The aesthetic in practice with particular reference to play and poetics

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Award date:
2006

Awarding institution:
University of Bath

THE AESTHETIC IN PRATICE

with particular reference to play and poetics

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2006

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Abstract

This thesis addresses two questions,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way support participative inquiry with others?

I examine how, through my presence as a facilitator using an action research approach, I become increasingly attuned to the aesthetic of play and the poetic in practice. I trace how this deepening sense of the participative nature of the aesthetic influences my practice.

The *aesthetic in practice* is defined as the sensory perceptions which flow from practice, and the thoughts and feelings that form around them. Aesthetic knowing is shown to be located on a spectrum, from the intrinsic aesthetic embedded in everyday experience, to the expressive aesthetic in arts-based processes.

I contextualise my account through autoethnographic writing. I examine changes in my ontological and epistemological viewpoint that accompanied a move from the positivist practice of management training, to participative inquiry based on action research approaches. My theoretical framework derives from Bateson's participative worldview and from phenomenology, particularly Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty. I describe my inquiry methods as an iterative cycle of analysis and sense-making, using journaling, auto-ethnography and photos, as a base-line.

The main research setting for this thesis is a day centre for people with learning disabilities. This took place in three stages. The first was a period of volunteering and personal orientation. The second consisted of a cooperative inquiry with front-line staff and the third, a media-based inquiry with staff and people with moderate learning disability. The aesthetic experience of participating with people there profoundly influenced my research.

My purpose in writing this thesis has been to understand better the transformational aesthetic engendered in reflexive and cooperative inquiry. This has led to a deepening of my own level of awareness of the improvisatory play and the intrinsic poetic that enlivens interactions. I have also explored how symbolic representation through expressive activities helps in re-imagining and sharing experience. Through this inquiry I have developed a participative practice in which more conscious aesthetic knowing supports processes of sense-making and change.

Contents

Acknowledgements

To my wife, Bren, for her continuing encouragement throughout and to my family, Sarah, Ben, Alexia, Daniel and Eliza. My thanks to all for their love and patience.

To Donna Ladkin, my supervisor, for her rigorous critiques, good humour and valuable insights, and for raising to the level of a mantra the words, 'On we go.'

To all the staff and people who attend the *Silver Street* day centre for people with learning disabilities and in particular to *Beverley*, the Centre manager.

To Jan Fielden, a colleague, for reading drafts and provoking long reflections by asking good short questions.

I gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce those Silver Street photos attributed in the text to Artscope; all other photos are my own.

Also, I acknowledge use of "The Road Not Taken" from The Poetry of Robert Frost edited by Edward Connery Lathem, published by Jonathan Cape. This is reprinted by permission of The Random House Group Ltd.

Preface

Rumi, the Sufi poet, expresses his wonder at the destruction and re-creation of breaking through the old rules to the mystery of a new way.

The new rule

> It's the old rule that drunks have to argue
> and get into fights.
> The lover is just as bad. He falls into a hole.
> But down in that hole he finds something shining,
> worth more than any account of money or power.
>
> Last night the moon came dropping its clothes in the street.
> I took it as a sign to start singing,
> falling up into the bowl of sky.
> The bowl breaks. Everywhere is falling everywhere.
> Nothing else to do.
> Here's the new rule: break the wineglass,
> and fall toward the glassblower's breath ...'

Rumi, (1207-1273) translated by Coleman Barks (1995)

In this thesis I aspire to break some of my old rules and fall towards the glassblower's breath.

Prelude to Part A

This first part of the thesis aims to provide a scene-setter for my subsequent inquiry into the aesthetic in practice. Its four chapters offer the reader a contextual account of my personal, philosophical and methodological approach to this inquiry. It forecasts a story of transition or personal journey from a way of working based on a positivist view of training and development towards a very different world of participative practice based on action research.

This inquiry focuses on my growing preoccupation with aesthetic knowing, both as I experience it as an intrinsic phenomenon in daily life and also as an expressive activity resulting in artefacts and other imaginative processes.

Here's a brief guide to the four chapters:

Chapter 1– Introduction
This is intended as an overview of the starting point for this inquiry. I define the two questions, which this thesis addresses,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way support participative inquiry with others?

The chapter then tells the *backstory* of a changing practice. I introduce *Silver Street*, the name I have given in the interests of confidentiality to the location of much of my research, a day centre for people with learning disabilities. Also in this chapter the main theoretical framework of this research is outlined at ontological, epistemological and methodological levels. Reference is made to Bateson, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty and contemporary research into the aesthetics of organizations.

I define how I am using the term *aesthetic in practice* and feature the distinction I will make between the intrinsic and expressive dimensions of the aesthetic in practice. In particular I shall be inquiring into play and the poetic, in my analysis of practice. As my approach to this inquiry is based on action research, I explain why participative facilitation of cooperative inquiries attuned well with my need for a new epistemological basis for my work.

Chapter 2 – The inquiring 'I'

Adopting an autoethnographic approach I have compiled a multi-voiced and reflexive account of my life during the period of this research. I also include pictures and stories relating to earlier stages in my life and comment on what they say to me about the inevitability of conducting this research.

The aesthetic nature of this chapter's presentation echoes the larger purpose of this thesis.

Chapter 3 – A theoretical framework

This chapter describes a framework which will be drawn on in thinking about the aesthetic in practice throughout the rest of the thesis. A participative worldview is outlined with reference to Abram, Wheatley, Capra and Skolimowsky. The main focus though falls on the work of Bateson and his concept of an ecology of *mind*, which he understood to be a living information flow in a system. His concept of the *news of difference* as the point where learning occurs will be drawn on later in the thesis in analysing practice experience.

I then describe how I found a growing affinity with phenomenology and reference this through Heron and Reason's concept of a *Subjective-Objective* participation with the world. The main focus here is on the work of Merleau-Ponty and his vision of returning to 'the things themselves' and embodied knowing through which, he argues, we discover in all other objects the miracle of expression.

The chapter concludes with definitions of the key theoretical concepts of action research that I will be drawing on as a frame for understanding my developing practice in participative inquiry.

Chapter 4 – Inquiry methods

I start by defining the nature of this inquiry in order to show how the methods I have developed attune to it. The themes of play and the poetic are seen as lying at the centre of the inquiry. This dictated inquiry methods which echo this aesthetic. Intrinsic and expressive dimensions of the aesthetic are described and the major themes of play and the poetic are more fully defined.

Then an iterative process for the description, analysis and further sense-making of material is described and illustrated in use.

Writing, in the form of journaling and autoethnography, provides the base-line material for this inquiry and I therefore discuss the theory that supports this way of working.

In a final section on visual ethnography I provide a brief theoretical overview of this way of working. I then include for discussion and analysis a selection of photos from Silver Street.

Part A is to be seen as a marker of the beginning of a significant journey that is to take me through the most profound period of change in my working practice. I also see it as the beginning of a reconciliation between my own aesthetic life and a different way of working and being with people.

Further reflections on the process of this journey will be picked up in a series of interludes between each of the four Parts of the thesis, as well as in short *working sketches*, which perform a similar function between chapters.

Part A

FRAMING THIS INQUIRY

1 Introduction

1 Introduction

Reflexive inquiries such as this one, are often described as a form of journey. I too have jostled along familiar and crowded thoroughfares; I have sought out green routes over the mountains and languished in foreign jails. At the outset I put together a tidy set of luggage, some of which I have now lost or deliberately thrown into the rapids as I crossed ravines.

But through iterations of action, reflection and writing, this inquiry journey has led me into a territory which still offers surprises but also consolations. It is a place where many issues, thoughts and feelings have come together, revealing meaning like sun or moonlight over landscape. As I write, I want to convey the freshness and particularity of this journey.

In this first chapter I will give some of the main co-ordinates of the thesis, its latitude and longitude. I will,

- define the two key questions that this inquiry seeks to address
- tell the *backstory* of how I came to pursue this inquiry
- introduce my theoretical framework
- explain my working definitions for the key terms used in the title of this inquiry
- introduce the organizational setting in which I conducted most of my inquiry
- explain my choice of an action research approach to this inquiry
- introduce the device of *working notes* as a meta-commentary on the process of writing this thesis.

It sounds a lot? Well be reassured that this is a brief route map, a series of markers. The fuller inquiry will unfold in subsequent telling.

Key questions

In this thesis I am concerned to address two main questions,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way support participative inquiry with others?

Put this briefly, the questions spawn many other questions, but there is at this stage something to be said for economy if it provides focus.

What is it about these two questions that attracts me? The first question is directed towards

my making better sense of my practice from the perspective of aesthetic knowing. My working practice is as a facilitator of groups who want to review their ways of relating and performing, and do better. I have also come to think of practice more broadly as a continuing process of reflexive experience in my life. Instead of *process* I am tempted to use the word *discipline* which is certainly a large part of it, but there is a point when discipline becomes invisible, an intrinsic part of living.

Through my inquiry and the writing and collection of material for this thesis I want to raise my own conscious understanding of the rich spectrum of the aesthetic in my practice as I examine what it is that draws my attention and how I reflect on it in the moment and afterwards.

My second question focuses on my practice relationships with others by asking in what ways my own developing aesthetic in practice supports a shared process of inquiry. I will describe this as an unfolding relationship with others, which has its sources in sensory and affective participation.

I will return later in this chapter to give a closer definition of how I am using some of these key terms; but for the moment I switch to a more autoethnographic mode to tell the *backstory* of why these inquiry questions matter to me.

The backstory

At the beginning of this inquiry my practice was changing significantly. I need to describe briefly this transition in my working life; it will be a theme which I amplify in different ways throughout the thesis. I see this transition as part of a more pervasive and far-reaching shift in my reflexive life as I continue to find new perspectives on how I relate to others and make better sense of my experience of the world.

In the mid to late '90s I was becoming less and less satisfied with my role as a management training consultant and fundamentally questioned the positivist framing of this work that I had adopted. I found myself uneasy with the role of expert tutor to managers. Whilst I strove to 'train' in a facilitative mode, I had a sense that, beyond the benefits of the immediate social ambience for the day, learning outcomes were unpredictable. Whether or not participants found them useful in subsequent practice was usually beyond any form of meaningful evaluation.

I found myself questioning how such complex life skills might be 'transferred' in the setting of a training room. As Strati (1999) points out,

> **'Explicit description of the practice of skills can indeed bring out some underlying features, and it can provide some guidelines for action, yet it is unable to tell us what an actor is doing, or to teach him/her to do it.' (Strati, 1999, p. 94)**

Ragland (2006) describes how her colleagues ask her to advise them on the best way to foresee impending violence between young people in a juvenile correctional facility in Tennessee.

> **'Even if I could explain how I know what to do, I am not sure that it would be helpful to someone else. My knowing in the moment is based in large measure on my relationships with the others involved, as well as how I approach them.' (Ragland, 2006, p. 168)**

I was increasingly problematizing the validity of training, particularly in the form it was conceived of by those who commissioned it.

Through my reading of Capra (1997), Skolimowski (1994) and Stacey (1996) I had begun to see organizations as complex adaptive systems. It therefore seemed difficult to engage with such complexity only through working with stratified enclaves of staff, often junior to middle in the hierarchy. Frequently the theories in use that such groups brought into the room were that their seniors, who were 'not in the room', were the cause of the 'problem'. Indeed these perceptions may sometimes have been justified, but with only half the data it was hard to know. If those with power, no matter how benign their intentions, decide on behalf of others what needs to be learnt, there is bound to be some slippage. However, I felt that my role as a trainer was often compromised by the limited scope available to explore such issues of power with those who wielded it.

Corporate 'rolled out' training programmes are often seen by participants, for what they are, – the implementation of management agendas. Whilst this may not present problems to some who can sign up to the message, others see things differently and feel manipulated. The corporate design of such events often takes the form of promoting today's solutions to yesterday's problems.

Even so I acknowledged that it is possible to try to work within the limitations of training programmes and still make some contribution to the well-being and efficiency of individuals and organizations. However in the words of Wheatley (1996) I was becoming aware of there being a 'simpler way', one which was more attuned to the processes of dialogue and self-organising, a more authentic way of inquiring into the complexity of organizational life. I also found myself increasingly experiencing a discontinuity between the values I was working from in different parts of my life. Literature in the form of novels, poetry and drama offered me more perceptive insights into the human condition than stereotypic representations of problems to be resolved through prescribed training solutions.

This led to my withdrawing from such work and trying to develop a new form of collaborative learning practice. At the centre of this new way of inquiring I was to re-discover the role of aesthetic knowing in my own day-to-day reflexive experience and learn more about how this influenced my working with others.

How this unfolding of a different kind of practice occurred, constitutes the main storyline of this thesis.

To conclude this *backstory* I would add that part of the liberation that I have experienced is that I now see practice as a wholistic process where every connection with others offers new reflexive and active possibilities. Marshall (1999) makes the case for living life as inquiry, validated by an iteration of inner and outer arcs of mindful attention to what is happening, how it is perceived it and what is noticed in others' responses.

As Torbert (2001) remarks,

> **'..one's whole life with others aspires towards a continual living inquiry.' (Torbert, 2001, p. 252)**

Reason (1998) sees inquiry as,

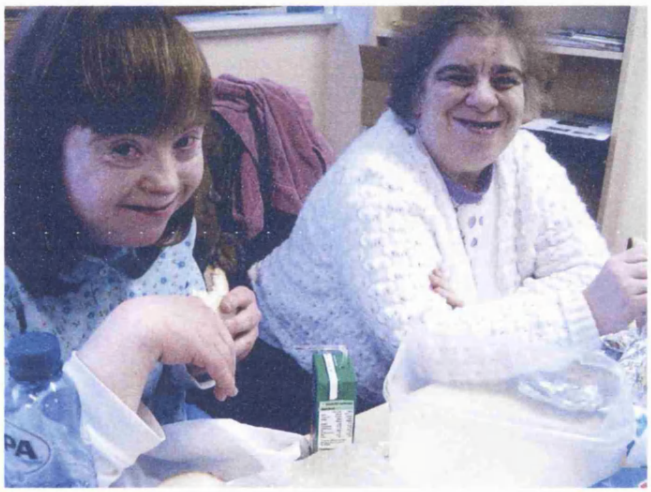
> **'... a collaborative process whose purpose is practical: to contribute to the flourishing of individual persons, the flourishing of human community, and the flourishing of the biosphere of which we are part. In this vision, inquiry becomes more than the professional activity of academics, and becomes a central characteristic of a well-lived life.' (Reason, 1998, p. 419)**

In envisioning inquiry in this way Reason not only confirms its centrality in a well-lived life, but points to the transformational nature of this participative relationship with the world. I will later explore this holistic vision further when I ground this inquiry in a participative ontology by reference to the work of Gregory Bateson.

The main organizational setting for my inquiry

Throughout the period of my involvement in CARPP during the last five years, I have been developing this new participative approach to my professional work in a range of public sector organizations and will draw on this to find insights into my growing understanding of the aesthetic in my practice.

A significant setting for much of my work during the period of writing this thesis has been in a day opportunities service for people with learning disabilities. I have disguised its identity by giving it the fictitious name of **Silver Street**.



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Engaging with both the individuality and the universality of this separate world became the trigger for a profound period of reflection on what practice means to me. I will explain as the story unfolds how out of this experience have arisen new personal perspectives on the development of my own aesthetic and ways in which I can work with this in my practice.

Learning disabilities

The world of care for people with learning disabilities is one which three years ago was more or less unknown to me but which I have been increasingly drawn into as the research continues. My confronting people's disabilities, economic constraints, lack of independence and restricted life choices, when compared to my own, has forced me to explore many of my

assumptions about *human flourishing*, a phrase which Heron and Reason (1997) use to describe the overall purpose of inquiry.

I have derived more sense of participation and joy from this connection than from most of my other assignments during the last twenty years.

My evolving method of inquiry at Silver Street

Working initially as a volunteer in the day opportunities centre, washing up, pushing wheel chairs and going on bus trips, I experienced a different kind of relationship, more akin to friendship, which developed over a period of time. I will expand on this new relationship later and reflect on its significance in my changing understanding of practice. (This stage of my work is subsequently referred to as Silver Street-1, for simplicity.)

Following this initial period as a volunteer I was invited to facilitate a project (Silver Street-2) for front-line staff in a participative inquiry[1] into 'person-centred planning' of activities for service users[2]. This was later followed by a third phase to my collaborative relationship with Silver Street when I facilitated a participative inquiry into finding work and training opportunities for people with learning disabilities. This inquiry (Silver Street-3) involved the active participation of both staff and people who use the service.

My method for inquiring into the thesis questions defined at the start of this chapter was to generate a collection of journal notes and photographs from each of the three phases. I shared each week's record with the people I had been working with. This publishing of my material in a loose-leaf folder in the centre staff room elicited further cycles of conversation and reflection on our working together. Latterly I have also experimented with taking and using photos as a further form of inquiry and a stimulus to dialogue.

Having selected the material to include in the thesis I have added another layer of analysis and sense-making as I relate what happened to my developing theoretical understanding of the aesthetic and its place in participative inquiry. (I give a fuller account of my methods in Chapter 4.)

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[1] I use the term 'participative inquiry' [Reason, 1999] to refer to a form of action research. I shall define these terms later in Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*.

[2] The term 'service user' calls for some comment. It is widely used in the Service, but people are, of course, more than users of services. It is hard though to find a better alternative. I have tried to avoid it wherever possible, except where to do so would be particularly cumbersome or confusing.

Introducing my theoretical framework

I locate my inquiry within what I refer to as a participative paradigm, (Capra, 1997, Bateson, 1972 and Skolimowski, 1994). Within this are many theoretical approaches, but they all share in common a questioning of a dualist epistemology in which a separate external reality is seen as the subject of observation and analysis from a detached and objective viewpoint by a rational empirical researcher.

In reflecting on my experience over the last decade I realized that I had been moving away from a positivist epistemology in many areas of my life and thought and, of most relevance to this inquiry, in those areas concerned with understanding of, and working with organizations. I now briefly sketch in some of the stages of this personal transition.

I was attracted to social constructionism because of the importance it attached to dialogue as a form of collaborative sense-making process; my having studied English Literature for my first degree may have enhanced this interest. Isaac (1996) describes dialogue as, 'the art of thinking together'. This echoed my interest in the reflexive linguistic processes of co-creation of meaning, (Gergen, 1999, Shotter, 1993), as I noticed more acutely what I and others brought to dialogic encounters. I am still persuaded of the usefulness of the concept of 'conversational realities' as developed by Shotter (1993) who subtitled his book, 'Constructing Life through Language'.

However I came also to see that the 'linguistic turn' provides only one of several lens through which to understand the co-construction of meaning. Heron and Reason (1997) describe an extended epistemology of four different types of knowing; I shall refer to this more fully below. However for the purposes of this brief overview I notice that one of these four ways of knowing, experiential knowing, is seen by them as original and *prior* to representation of experience in speech or art. Experiential knowing is a potent source of other forms of knowing. For example, the experiences I had on entering the world of Silver Street were often intense and I was compelled to engage with them in the moment as a vital connection with the people I met. I experienced the subsequent act of writing about them as a different way of knowing, a reflective inquiry, energized by, but different from, the immediacy of the experience.

Although social construction offered me a theory that connected with my interest in poetry and writing, I found it hard to conceive of a reality which is in some sense dependent for its being, on human articulation. The step beyond this involved exploring a participative

epistemology which engages directly with experiential knowing as well as other forms of knowing. As Heron and Reason (1997) explain,

> **'Our work with cooperative inquiry, in mindfulness practices and ceremony, and our attempts at aware everyday living all convince us that experiential encounter with the presence of the world is the ground of our being and knowing. This encounter is prior to language and art – although it can be symbolized in language and art.' (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 276)**

Prompted by such insights, I returned to the work of Bateson (1972 and 1987) whose ontology is rooted in a participative worldview. His notion of 'mind' also recognizes the aesthetic dimensions of an unfolding and systemic universe.

Since my inquiry draws on the perception of the aesthetic in daily practice I have also begun to explore the diverse and complex field of phenomenology and in particular the work of Gadamer (1975) and Merleau-Ponty (1942, 1945 and 1964). Their view of perception as a participative engagement with the world connects with and extends my understanding of Bateson's ecology of mind. Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodied knowing relates closely to my own awareness of the inseparability of the physical, the emotional and the cognitive. I will later draw on this ontological and epistemological theory to cast light on how I perceive and respond to relationships with others in my practice.

Within this broad framework I have found another theoretical resource for my inquiry, in the literature relating to the aesthetic perspectives of organizational life and practice. Writings within this area of comparatively new research contribute significantly to my personal inquiry. The writings of Barry (1994, 1996 and 1997), Carter and Jackson (2000), Linstead (2000), Strati (1992 and 1999), Taylor (2000, 2003 and 2005), Taylor and Hansen (2005) and Winter (1999 and 2001), amongst many others, have helped me challenge and extend my own thinking about the connection between organizational and aesthetic theory.

I now want to return to Silver Street and the source material of this inquiry to keep it grounded in practice. In particular I want to show how the experiential and presentational dimensions just referred to will help structure my experiences.

Engaging with Silver Street

As I have mentioned above, one of the significant steps in developing this inquiry was my discovery of Silver Street, or its discovery of me. I shall also refer to other settings I have found myself working or being in, but it is Silver Street that has proved to be the most profound and challenging, as a location for my inquiry.

Journal ... Lina's moment, 13/11/03

> I arrive an hour early so that I can tune back into Silver Street. An unexpected contact with Lina plunges me straight back in. She is there in the entrance hall, shouting and very angry. A young woman in reception whom I have not seen before is coping in a good-natured unflustered way with Lina's indiscriminate anger. Elaine, one of the administrators, joins in as we try to placate Lina. Elaine explains that Lina came in distressed today. She had not slept well. I recall that Lina sees herself as being different. 'The others in there can't talk', she had said to me previously, of the other people in her Unit.
>
> Today she is feeling very disturbed and suddenly turns and spits at me, fortunately missing. She shouts that she wants her hair cut very short. She then pulls her sleeve up and bites her arm hard. She looks at the deep teeth marks in her arm and has another go. Elaine tries to distract her by offering a cup of water, as she comforts her. I am back in this world where extreme need is played out so rawly and where my only naïve intuitive skill is to be a calming presence, trying to talk Lina out of the moment. Lina responds by shouting loudly in my face, 'You fat cow'.

The sensory impact of this short episode is there embedded in my mind, – the teeth marks, the saliva, and the wracked face. Also there is my momentary bewilderment as I try to make sense of her anguish, the anger and aggression and its unsatisfactory resolution – unsatisfactory because I cannot guess how to communicate with the unsmiling face, the darting eyes, the head turned away. I feel deskilled by the encounter and my resolution of this is to become no more than a calming presence.

I present this at this stage in writing, to indicate the kind of dilemma that pointed me towards an inquiry into the aesthetic in practice. How did the immediacy and vividness of

these sensory perceptions connect with me and re-shuffle other perceptions and feelings in my life? Was there any beauty in this encounter? What was the nature of my relationship with this extraordinary place as experienced in this moment? How does my written representation of it influence my understanding of Lina or indeed other relationships? What imaginative reconstruction does it trigger in others as they read it? I needed to stay with and make personal sense of such questions arising from this and many other experiences, not all as emotionally raw as my encounter with Lina, but still moving in their difference.

I discovered in Silver Street an aesthetic environment that was rich in sensory impact particularly for me, as a newcomer, and which often exposed me to a more direct expression of this aesthetic in feelings, words, actions, than in other more conventional settings.

In contrast to this immediacy of expression in some people, there was also the mystery of profoundly disabled people whose lives seemed locked into private non-verbal worlds which lay beyond my reach. As time went on I was to discover this impression of disconnection was relative; there were moments of connection and when they came they were all the more remarkable for that. I describe several such later in this thesis.

Whether in my relationships with the volatile and expressive or the inward and closed, I realised that this was a world of enormous difference from other life settings I had previously experienced. I needed to explore what sense I was making of the aesthetic perceptions and judgements that the place elicited from me. I also began to reflect on the extent to which I might come to see my other worlds differently through the lens of these experiences. Joy, anger, enclosure and disconnection were not only to be found in Silver Street, albeit elsewhere they were often cloaked behind a different cultural veneer.

Working definition

I propose now to offer a working definition of the terms used in the title of this thesis. It will be short enough to provide some clarity about my intentions in using it, but no longer than this, as the concepts will be explored and defined more deeply in subsequent chapters.

What do I mean by 'the aesthetic in practice'?

> **'*Aesthetics*, collective singular noun. The science of conditions of sensuous perception.'**
> **The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary**

I include in my use of the term *the aesthetic*, sensory perceptions of the world and the thoughts and feelings that spring from them. In their review of organizational aesthetics, Taylor and Hansen (2005) adopt a similar description,

> **'Broadly, aesthetics is concerned with knowledge that is created from our sensory experiences. It also includes how our thoughts and feelings around them inform our cognitions.' (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1212)**

These thoughts and feelings are embodied in sensuous and narrative imagery as they are processed in inner reflection. They also find expression through embodied responses, gestures and words as we communicate with others.

Aesthetic knowing operates between sensory perceptions and the feelings, ideas and representations that emanate from them. It is embedded in the fabric of relationality and the mundane experiences of life which are,

> **'only mundane in the sense that aesthetic understandings are so profoundly ingrained and unquestioned that their maintenance through the reconstruction of aesthetic forms in organizations seems so routinely ordinary.' (Ibid., p. 1226)**

Taylor and Hansen talk of 'connection' as being at the centre of their understanding of aesthetic epistemology. Citing Bateson (1979) and Ramirez (1991) they identify the limitations of studying connection in aesthetics for instrumental purposes. They rather choose to focus on,

> **'... aesthetic experience and aesthetic forms fundamentally because they are about our feelings of what it is to be part of more than ourselves.' (Ibid., p. 1215)**

This innate and intuitive sense of the aesthetic can be seen as being closely associated with finding connection with existential purpose.

Strati (1999) captures something of the complexity of this evocative representation of our inner world to others when he describes aesthetic inquiry as it occurs in organizational settings,

> **'... the heuristic process of evocation involves knowledge-gathering about a particular organizational phenomenon on the basis of experience of that phenomenon. This experience occurs only in the imagination of the subject, but is lived experience nevertheless.' (Strati, 1999, p. 11)**

Strati's understanding of the aesthetic encompasses these verbal, visual and sensory perceptions. He also focuses his discussion of the aesthetic as it is evidenced in *organizational artefacts;* within this term he includes,

> **'... any characteristic of an organization which is able to 'tell' us something about the organization.' (Ibid., 1999, p. 11)**

As an example he describes the chair as an organizational artefact, as it is perceived by people in different aesthetic ways, depending on such qualities as its design, cultural references, position and use. He concludes that,

> **'... it became plain from examination of the relations among ontological, ethical and aesthetic characteristics that the latter are an important 'engine' of organizational life.' (Ibid., p. 49)**

I found this extension of the term *aesthetic* compelling because it made an essential link for me between a pervasive sensory absorption of the world and the heuristic sense-making that we engage in an equally pervasive and often less than conscious way.

It is necessary also to consider the place, within a definition of the aesthetic, of works of shaping imagination, such as poetry, pictures, music and other art forms. Although they are less familiar a part of organizational life, they have a central place in the development of many people's inner lives. Although individual taste is infinitely variable, creative artefacts, whether i-pod downloads, sung masses or daily newspapers, give pleasure or pain and feed and shape the imaginal life.

Drawing on Heron and Reason (1997) and their use of the word 'knowing' as a way of describing different epistemological relationships with the world, I see 'aesthetic knowing' as a complement to a number of other forms of knowing, including propositional knowing. Gagliardi (1996) argues that aesthetic processes provide the source from which other forms of knowing, such as the intellectual, spring. I shall inquire into how these aesthetic

processes contribute to my own reflexive stance towards the world and influence my participation with others.

The term *aesthetic* is also associated with beauty. The OED ascribes a second meaning to *aesthetic* as, **'belonging to the appreciation of the beautiful'**. In perceiving the world, we make individual judgements about what attracts us and what repels us, what is beautiful and what is ugly to us. Aesthetic artefacts invite us to make individual judgements of this sort. As Strati (2000) points out, aesthetic judgements are also made about the comic, the sublime, the ugly and the grotesque, as well as the beautiful.

Strati (1999) further enhances the connection between organizational artefacts and theories of social conflict, by pointing out that they

> **'... do not constitute an imaginary terrain of peace, love and harmony. On the contrary I have repeatedly stressed that they are subject to social conflict in organizations, to the violence of corporate cultures, to the power of the dominant coalitions in organizational life.' (Strati, 1999, p. 75)**

Taylor and Hansen (2000) suggest that in an organization, the stage of engaging with the other-than-beautiful aesthetic may be a necessary step towards change.

> **'The idea of having more beauty in organizations is intuitively appealing, but the aesthetic category of the grotesque may be the key to personal and organizational transformation.' (Taylor and Hansen, 2000, p.1216)**

This reference to change moves my focus from understanding the aesthetic as a phenomenon solely to be experienced, whether as a scholar or an artist, and opens up a territory of action and intervention, based on aesthetic knowing on the part of a facilitator and an organizational group.

As the poet Adrienne Rich (2006) puts it, the 'aesthetic' can be defined,

> **'not as a privileged and sequestered rendering of human suffering, but as news of an awareness, a resistance, which totalising systems want to quell: art reaching into us for what's still passionate, still unintimidated, still unquenched.' (Rich, 2006, p. 3)**

(There is some resonance here between the *news of an awareness, a resistance* that the poet, Adrienne Rich, describes, and Bateson's concept of the *news of difference*, discussed further in Chapter 3, A theoretical framework.)

These then are the main dimensions and processes I group under the term 'the aesthetic'.

Framing this inquiry as action research

Throughout this reflective inquiry I adopt an Action Research approach; I shall now briefly define what this means to me and in subsequent chapters I will explore further how this finds expression in my practice.

I started to learn about Action Research at the beginning of my study for an MSc in Organizational Consulting at Ashridge in 1998. I was attracted to its participative stance; I also appreciated the fact that its proponents openly declared an aspiration towards practical learning. I felt that I was building on my earlier reading of humanist texts by Rogers (1961) and Freire (1972), reinforced subsequently by Lewin (1967) and Schon (1983). I became aware of the ways in which such an espousal of participative ways of working might challenge and change my sense of role as a facilitator. As I describe the three principal Silver Street case studies in this thesis I shall explore the extent to which I have worked with greater commitment to this collaborative approach.

Action research encompasses a range of different approaches and methods, several of which I now have experience of, such as Appreciative Inquiry, (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2004), Future Search, (Weisbord and Janoff, 2000) and Open Space, (Owen, 1997). I have taken from these methodological approaches those elements that suit the needs and circumstances of particular groups.

Winter (2003) captures some of this pragmatism in describing his critical realist stance on Action Research.

> **'Narratives of reflexive critical evaluations of current practices and theories, describing collaborative negotiations among stakeholders with differing interests in order to agree and implement practical changes: this may not be the only way of contributing to the progress of human knowledge and certainly not the easiest. But, speaking philosophically as well as practically, it has much to recommend it. In other words, it represents a coherent and informed response to theoretical issues which have been identified, in contemporary**

> **philosophy, as raising crucial questions of purpose, methodology and validity for social inquiry in general.' (Winter, 2003, p.9)**

Reason (1999) compares three types of Action Research, – Cooperative Inquiry, Participant Action Research and Action Science. The second and third pieces of Silver Street work described later in this thesis aspire to a form of Co-operative Inquiry. The main strand of my personal application of Action Research is closer to the type of self-reflexive inquiry into practice described by Marshall, (1999, 2001). Following her, I have adopted an iterative process of inner and outer arcs of mindful inquiry, as I notice my aesthetic responses to encounters and attend to the perceptions, thoughts and feelings that are represented through these inquiry processes.

I shall return to action research as the approach adopted in this inquiry when, in Chapter 3, I give a fuller account of the theoretical frame within which I am working.

Conclusion

This chapter was intended to open up the direction, scope and nature of the inquiry described in this thesis. It has done so from the perspective of my personal history, both professional and philosophical.

I offer a brief recap of what I have covered.

I started by defining two related key questions,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way support a participative practice with others?

In telling the 'backstory' which led to the formulation of these questions, I explained how my practice has undergone significant change during this period and I sketched in some of the direction of this transition from working as a training consultant to facilitation of participative learning through action research. I also referred to the epistemological shifts in my reflection on practice that led to this change.

I introduced the Silver Street setting for this work and gave a first account of my reasons for choosing to locate my inquiry in a day centre for people with learning disabilities. The story of Lina was used to illustrate the rich sensory impact of Silver Street and the provocation

that such moments offered to me to 're-story' many of my assumptions about human flourishing.

I then introduced the main elements of my theoretical framework at the ontological, epistemological and methodological levels. I gave particular emphasis to the participative paradigm and within that to action research.

Next I offered a working definition of my thesis title, 'The Aesthetic in Practice'. I touched on the dictionary definition of aesthetics as 'the science of conditions of sensuous perception' and I referred to Strati's placing of the aesthetic as 'an important engine of organizational life'.

I then raised the question of the other-than-beautiful as part of a broader spectrum of inquiry into the aesthetic in practice.

I concluded by explaining why I came to frame this inquiry as action research and began to sketch in what this means to me.

It would be wonderful if it were possible to say everything at once by shaking free of linear text and offering something akin to a big bang of meaning, an informative explosion where nothing would take precedence or be seen to be missing. In the absence of such a miracle I offer the subsequent chapters, where I hope to fill out the details and move the story forward.

An introductory note on Working Sketches

As a rider to this first chapter, I now introduce a writing device which I am calling *Working Sketches*; I also attach a first example overleaf. I shall at intervals between chapters include entries of this sort to plot the line of making this extended piece of writing. I want to use them much as an artist might, to make sketches and notes to record ideas and feelings about the processes of making an artwork. In so doing I shall often adopt aesthetic processes as the most appropriate way of presenting these reflections. They follow a broadly chronological sequence with one or two exceptions where they record later perceptions on my writing of a particular chapter.

The first working sketch overleaf is intended to step outside the text and look in on the process at the beginning of reflecting on and writing this thesis. In so doing it offers a meta-commentary on the iterative and unfolding experience of the inquiry process which, unlike text, does not move in a linear fashion.

This working sketch was written near the beginning of this thesis writing process. Through it I reflect on some of my initial sense of what Shotter (1993) refers to as the 'open and unfinalized' nature of both the inquiry I was setting out on and my ways of representing it at the end of 2004. At that stage, the task ahead was feeling to me like searching out something infinitely alluring but frustratingly elusive.

Working sketch – Open and unfinalized text? 29/12/04

As I write, I shall bear in mind the caution flagged up by Shotter (1993),

'... the production of an intelligible order in reflection, by construction of a narrative account, quite often distorts what the character of the situation was in actual practice: it falsely completes what was an open and unfinalized circumstance, whose very openness 'invited' and 'enabled' the action taken with it, as something finalized and complete.' (Shotter,1993, p. 15)

I wonder how far I shall be able to get to what Shotter sees as 'open and unfinalized' in the representation of my practice. In recognising the inevitability of things being lost in translation, I am simply putting myself alongside any other writer, film maker or thesis writer.

I therefore want to find ways of presenting the thesis, that retain some sense of unfolding and shaping, since I do not expect the process of inquiry to stand still while I write. Writing changes things in some way, as do all acts of representation. Turning reflection into words on a page imposes a selectivity and linear order to illusive non-linear experience. I wonder at this stage how far I can hold the freshness of thinking and feeling about what I describe, without losing coherence and structure.

I shall therefore explore the tension of working with aesthetic contents and process, whilst writing a propositional discourse. I shall at intervals work in aesthetic ways to offer the reader an analogue of experiences I describe.

Another issue - finding the true centre of this inquiry; Shotter (1993) reflects on the relationship between the search for 'objects' in inquiries and the chosen processes of searching.

'...our supposed objects of study are of less concern to us than the general nature of our investigatory practices. In other words, instead of metatheory, we become concerned with *metamethodology*; primarily, we become interested in the procedures and devices we use in both 'socially constructing' the subject matter of our investigations, as well as how we establish and maintain a contact with it ...' (Ibid., p.158)

Now as a further stage of sense-making on re-reading this sketch, I would add that the aesthetic nature of this inquiry inevitably means that metatheory and metamethodologies overlap. Occasionally I shall find that the aesthetic metatheory of my inquiry narrative fuses with methodologies in ways in which the essence of neither is diminished. An example may be found in the next chapter where I inquire into the personal context of my making this inquiry: this is done almost exclusively through aesthetic methodologies of autoethnographic writing, poetry and photos, briefly linked by propositional commentary.

Otherwise the thesis juxtaposes propositional theory with supporting evidence from Silver Street and elsewhere, in the form of expressive journaling and photos. Shotter's caveat will be borne in mind as I strive to tell the unfolding propositional narrative of this inquiry into the aesthetic in practice, whilst still attending to the aesthetic methods through which I come to understand it.

2 The inquiring 'I'

2 The inquiring 'I'

Introduction

In this chapter I present the picture and story of the 'I' who is making this journey. The material is presented as a bricolage, brought together out of intuition and pleasure in an imaginative offering to the unknown 'You' who reads this. Reflexively I am also part of this readership, in a simultaneous process of creating and experiencing, as I follow the warp and weft of what appears on the page.

In trying to bring into focus my life and the circumstances of this inquiry, I realise that I am also mirroring processes that I experience when I am relating to and working with groups. The extent of self-revelation either by me as facilitator or by participants to each other and to me is always a question of judgement; it is an expression of the trust that has grown between us. Getting to know people at Silver Street was sometimes a non-verbal process of being with or offering practical help to them. In doing so I was inevitably also expressing something of my own identity as I engaged with theirs.

Through first person inquiry in this chapter I am reflecting on the influences that make this inquiry vital for me now. I will do so using aesthetic processes which are at times poetic and playful.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) point out that many feminist researchers, (Behar, 1996, Behar and Gordon, 1995, Personal Narratives Group, 1989), who work in a reflexive ethnographic way, advocate starting research from one's own standpoint.

> **'Thus, to a greater or lesser extent, researchers incorporate their personal experiences and standpoints in their research by starting with a story about themselves, explaining their personal connection to the project, or by using personal knowledge to help them in the research process.' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 741)**

As the process of drafting and re-drafting of the thesis has continued, I have come to regard this chapter and the working sketches that occur throughout the rest of the writing, as playgrounds or oases where this personal voice can particularly find direct expression, although clearly not only there.

I will return at the end of this chapter to a fuller commentary on the ways in which producing this material contributes to the main inquiry themes of this thesis.

Futurist past

Before choosing to produce this chapter in this way I started by writing a prose account of my work as a group facilitator and some of the life stages that preceded this current employment. Then I realised that, as a professional autobiography, it left unrecognised whole strands of my experience, which are very relevant to this thesis.

Rather than throw it away I have decided to submit it to a process which the Italian futurist poet, F.T.Marinetti (1909), described in his Manifesto of Futurism.

He proposed a fundamental shake up of a literature which he felt had developed a pensive immobility. His solution was to subject poetry to a form of semantic violence where most familiar grammatical and poetic conventions are destroyed. He also went on to extol the virtues of the new beauty – speed, which he claimed would enrich the world's magnificence. In the headlong rush towards Futurist poetry he talks wildly about the destruction of libraries and academies.

This Italian iconoclast experimented with a form of poetry which involved creating a word string which deliberately avoided syntactical relationships. In a second 1913 manifesto entitled 'Destruction of Syntax/Imagination without Strings/Words-in-Freedom' or 'parole-in-liberta', he seeks a Futurist renewal of sensibilities, not only in poetry but all main art forms. He aspires to a level of freedom that would allow the artist to unleash 'imagination without strings.'

So in pursuit for a moment of 'imagination without strings', if not some other of Marinelli's gaols, I subjected my piece of writing to a similar deconstruction. In what follows I have selected every tenth noun, then every tenth adjective from the 1500 words I originally wrote.

Another part of Marinetti's approach was to increase the use of playful imagery by connecting things which seem impossible to link together. I note in passing that the playful yoking together of difference will be explored further in my considerations of play and the poetic in an aesthetic understanding of practice. Such a bringing together might occur between the dual meanings of metaphor or the dramatic tensions within dissonance or serendipity.

Prompted by Marinetti I have included two examples of playful imagery based on moments in the text.

The Futurists strove to adhere to simple rules which defy normal linguistic conventions to produce artefacts which seek to stand outside rationality. Marinetti was also responsible for ground-breaking innovations in typographic layout of text and book design. A later publication of his was printed on metal sheets. In deference to this excursion beyond the traditional typographic conventions of theses, I therefore experiment with colour and typography.

I acknowledge that my example below works from the rational framework of my original account and may therefore not conform to the randomness that Marinetti sought. However, here it is.

A Futurist poem – My working words

Every tenth noun

reader consultant orientation tendency education world experience role development Sussex consultant world development messages life development work self-fulfilment dimensions rationale collusion training system services feast workload scaling client training garden **Ashridge** alienation level *theories*

Every tenth adjective

Brief interesting complex first small utilitarian powerless successful apprehensive early **intuitive** autobiographical

Image 1

I never chose to be a keyhole surgeon,
working like a miner to perform major miracles.

Image 2

I was the Bastille,
then the liberation,
attacked by such a heartache,
now letting go of balloons.

An alternative version based on every verb

To help, is necessary, have worked, worked as, account for, have always, stems from, had worked in, clearly aligned, is driven by,

privileged, is divided up into, is also, does not recognise, refers to as, sign up, were, found, was frustrating, found myself, alerted me to, had moved into, assume, found,

had worked in, was, introduced me, focused on, foreshadowed, had the possibility of, entered into has been to, has released me, no longer spend days, were worth, have been able to, grew up

relished, brought, was choosing to, was, comes with, earn and make choices, found, occurs, were, dissociated, promoted, could be objectively assessed, seemed

Became, were asking me to do, felt, captures, shows, frames, found, was often assumed to be, became clear, derives from, might be, might seek, but not find, were left, would feel,

Is, may come, became increasingly, can rarely influence, was, was, offered, to build, would not, sought out, started, invested, places, is inevitable, do not always go, are lost as well as won, should have been deemed, are judged not to be, is hard

Were buoyant, worked hard, prove myself, talked, generates, seemed more, work, were complete and invoiced for, did more, represented, found, preferred, asked you, knew you, restricts

made me ill, ... I got up the next morning and had a heart attack. This changed most things in my life.

I notice how difficult it was not to cheat earlier by putting in the third more interesting noun or the second more revelatory adjective.

I admit to drifting at the end into more or less rational text. (In fact 'drifting' was the wrong metaphor; better to have said, water speeding up into a plughole or iron filings jumping around the magnet pole of this last undeniable fact.)

The poem stands for thirty years of my life.

Group portrait

A portrait of me drawn by eighteen people in nine minutes at the CARPP workshop on Visual Inquiry on 15 April 2005. Each person had 30 seconds in rotation to contribute to drawings of each other.

I find myself looking at this picture as an image which sets up remarkable resonances for me. It raises a host of questions. How do I see myself in the world and how am I seen? It is like the fleeting glance at a shop window reflection, to see today how far or near I am in accepting this image of myself. I am briefly distracted by the inaccurate shape of the glasses; whoever drew them didn't not look closely, or perhaps they did and saw what they drew. But the general 'sense' of the picture is in my view fully recognizable. Others who know me remark similarly on seeing it. So in representational terms the image has some of what Husserl would have called interpersonal validity; it conveys some shared meaning about me.

I sprayed it to protect the chalks and when it was dry rolled it carefully to get it back home. It was, and still is, an object of great value for me. It is pinned up on a beam in my study. Part of its significance is that it acts like a bridge between my experience of CARPP with its climate and space to explore different ways of inquiring, and my larger world of family and friends.

I have subsequently used this representational game from time to time with groups with whom I work. It is a powerful activity in that it gives each individual not just a picture, but a connection with all the interpretative eyes and hands that snatched the image out of the air.

Imaginary bridge

I inquire into the central place of metaphor at a number of places throughout this thesis, but particularly in Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*. I offer below an extended metaphor which is presented in the form of a poem. As I have already remarked in Chapter 1, much writing on personal and organizational change uses the metaphor of the 'journey'. Here I am interested in the bridge, not only for how it starts and ends, although that is of course interesting, but for the imaginative possibilities of looking from the middle of a new bridge for the first time.

Through acts of imagination we are able to see and experience things through different lenses and from different vantage points. Rumi captures this, in his evocative image of 'falling towards the glassblower's breath' in his poem which forms the preface to this thesis.

My writing records the tidal drift to and fro that makes for adoption of different perspectives on practice. I had written the following poem in 1999 and it now presents itself as a metaphor for the aesthetic process of my inquiry.

This theme of change and transformation through acts of imagination underpins much of this thesis. For example, I can find myself starting from a position of anxiety as I replay a conversation in my head. At the next iteration of dialogue with the same person a completely fresh and liberating understanding may emerge. I take this to be part of a creative and mutual process of imagining difference. Conversely I may find no such inspiration in the moment and be left with the fixity of anxiety I started with.

Imagination in this sense is applied to the most vital and close relations that we have. We can *imagine* them 'good' or 'bad'. Practice seems to me to be about helping people imagine and enact good differences and the pathway to doing this has strong aesthetic qualities. The externalization of inner thoughts and feelings that occurs in representation offers scope for transformation, where people have the will for this to happen.

The concept of a new Millennium bridge intrigued me before the structure was complete and prompted me to write about it. In a sense it therefore at that stage still partly existed in the imaginative minds of Anthony Caro, sculptor, Norman Foster, architect, and Arup, its engineers. But it was also already alive and shared in my imagination.

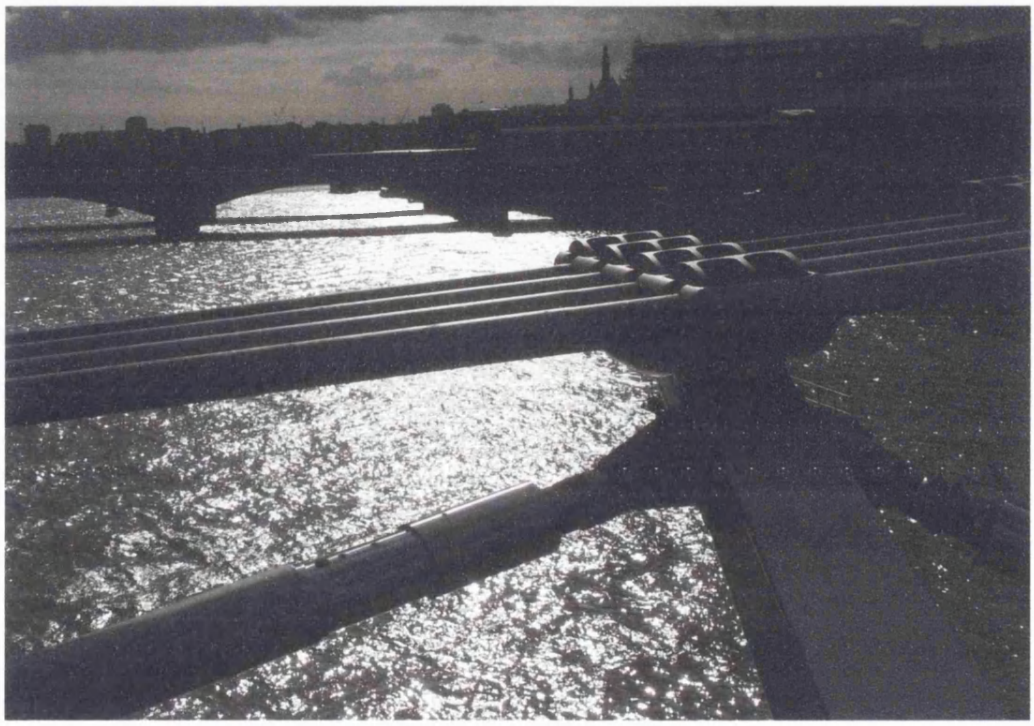
Mid-air, mid-stream

The taut footbridge skims the brown Thames,
landing one footfall by
the Tate's blockish finger in the sky
and leaps back to wear
Wren's double crown.

My feet, groundlings from the Southwark Bank,
now stand mid-air, mid-stream
in an ethereal place from which
before I never could have seen.

Now the dream bridge is a reality, I can stand at this formerly inaccessible point in the air above the Thames; it gives me a similar sense of pleasure as when in my early teens I became able to climb halfway up the poplar trees at the bottom of the garden.

I was surprised by the brutal strength of this recent digital image, which I took, straight into the sun. It creates some strong resonance with my aspirations and energies in the writing of this thesis. At an ontological level, it also features a recurrent theme for me, of structure and fluidity, of the interaction of the natural and the human world, which I will explore further in Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*.



This is about being in places from which before I never could have seen.

On re-reading my poem I also notice, for the first time, that it links the secular and sacred. At a deeper level too I have become aware of a metaphor for mystical sexual union in the architectural shapes of the Tate's sword and St Paul's inverted grail; no wonder the bridge vibrated with energy when first used!

The boy who thought he was Jesus

Another way of positioning my practice as I write, is to draw on some of the first person inquiry completed earlier in the CARPP process.

This piece features the source of the early groundedness of my life and the tensions and excitement of breaking away from this profound security.

> At the last trumpet every knee shall bow. In my early years, say till twelve, a question shadowed me, 'Would I and the rest of the startled world be bowing to Him, (very definitely a 'Him' in the 1940's), or would the world be bowing to Me?'
>
> Three times and sometimes four I walked to and fro across North Watford on Sundays to the Baptist church that gave me my main experience of anything approaching 'society', that larger world that lay beyond home. Home was fatherless, a warm nest of women, mother, sister, aunts, neighbours, a coterie in which I grew up. The men were away at war, or those who weren't were regarded as token men, old or excused boots in one way or another.
>
> When my father returned after demob from five years on a naval destroyer, he fitted apparently effortlessly back into the insurance office in Cornhill in the City for the rest of his working life. He also took up again the mantle of deacon at the church, later becoming Church Secretary, a role which commanded almost as much respect as that of minister.
>
> And so I grew up knowing that Jesus died on the cross in his thirty-second year, just as I also knew that Adam started the whole process off with Eve 4000 years prior to that.
>
> I also knew that some day when we would all least expect it – particularly the sinners who drank beer in the Stag, on which I spied from the top deck of the 321 bus, but not just for them, – He would return and there would be an enormous unravelling, the day of reckoning.
>
> The story of Christ's birth and upbringing became a luminous exemplar of how things could turn out for a lad growing up.

At seven I changed gear from one to two services per Sunday, plus Sunday school. The evening service was less well attended but had the same fervour of extemporised prayer, plus the close warmth of cuddling up to my mother during the interminable sermons. All the while I heard about Jesus, sometimes too about the Old Testament heroes and prophets, but mostly about Jesus. I wondered at precisely what age He knew that He would leave His mother and go about His father's business.

He modelled for me the righteous anger of this closed sacred world in its raging against the larger community, the money lenders and traders who polluted the temple. Were these the equivalent of the fast lads who came to our door peddling brushes and polish, no doubt beer on their breath from the Stag or the Clarendon Arms. This dilemma in spotting the boundary between the sacred and the profane persisted for me throughout these years.

Then there was the Jesus of the miracles, pulling up fish on the other side, turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, not just any old wine but high quality stuff. Did it bear any resemblance to the sugary non-alcoholic contents of the Baptist communion thimble-sized individual glasses which were consumed once a month in silent reverence by the converted?

Jesus and His miracles seemed just right to me, exactly what I would have done if I'd had the Holy Ghost at my right hand.

Then there were the forty days and forty nights, the betrayal, the humiliation and crucifixion? How could the wicked world have taken this calm, majestic, blond haired paragon, whose portrait hung in the Church minor hall and have done these things to Him? Should I too be prepared to suffer at the hands of the ungodly?

Jesus seemed to me to have been a clever boy, who could quote the Old Testament with great authority. Jesus would certainly have passed His 11+ like me.

Jesus as a team leader also caught my imagination. He had this talent for spotting disciples up trees or on a beach. He 'called' and they came to a different life with Him, forsaking their fathers and mothers. There was a lot of talk about 'calling' as I grew

older. My parents never pressured me, but there was a distinct ecclesiastical career path mapped out for any one at the church who had the aptitude.

Lingering still in my mind at the age of nine was this awareness that Jesus must have had an 'Ah Ha' experience around this time when He discovered that He was not just another lad with a carpenter for a Dad, but the Messiah. What responsibility, but what power? Was there some amazing opportunity for me here, so nurtured in the scriptures and now with the glow of sanctity that settled on me when I talked to my father about being converted at 12? Perhaps with hindsight this was already getting a bit late to have received the ultimate calling.

This sketch of me was drawn by a fellow guest at a farm house b.& b. that I went to with my parents and sister. I had just passed the 11+ and was therefore on the brink of a lot of new discoveries.

The trauma of total immersion in the public baptism that followed at 14 might have held these aspirations in focus a little longer.

But other forces were at work within me. Education can be a terrible thing. I began to discover the sides of me that were not satisfied by extemporary prayer and sugary communion wine. I caught vistas of a world where alcohol was consumed by intelligent and good people as a natural lubricant to fine company.

I also discovered nature for myself in long expeditions across boggy land over which the M1 was to be built four years later. I set off snipe which went weaving over the reeds,

long since compacted under a slip road at Junction 5. I found a dead swan with blood on it, wracked and rigid in the wet grass.

Slowly it became clear to me that probably I was not going to be Jesus after all. But the period in waiting, listening for the call, left its mark. I abandoned at the same time the idea of being a minister, particularly a Baptist one and embraced a new and far more exciting ministry, still with many values about staying with the best, but reaching out to discover the rest of the world which till then I had seen as enemy territory or at least no-man's land. Ahead lay learning, teaching, training, working with groups but still threaded through it the irrepressible query, 'If I wasn't going to be Jesus, who was I going to be?'

What's in a story?

(In fact I shall address this question again later in Chapter 8, 'The expressive aesthetic in practice', when I consider how story telling featured as part of an exploration of the expressive aesthetic in my practice.)

I now see even more clearly a continuing and creative tension between the security of home and the wild wonderful possibilities of the world at large. The attraction offered by an actual or metaphorical home is in tension with the urge to adventure. Home is an essential and supporting framing for experience as well as a limiting boundary. The markers of this boundary have varied at different times in my life. There have sometimes been steps too far into the unknown. Probably my biggest adventure was to leave the security of a salaried post and set up and run my own business twenty five years ago. This though is only one parameter of the 'home and away' theme and I wonder if at this early stage in representing my inquiry I have found a deep source of both pleasures of reflective isolation and the wish and need to participate. This might be another way of describing first and second person inquiry. Learning about these inner and outer arcs of attention and action involved me in moving to and fro and testing out what energies might be released whilst sensing what risks I was ready to take.

The potency of *home* and counterpull of *away* is a theme to which I return in considering Bachelard's (1958) poetics of space. (See Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*.)

The story marks in its closing paragraphs the consciousness of an aesthetic life that has stayed with me in varying forms, with greater or lesser active participation as a performer, a listener, writer, a reader and now picture taker.

The ground had been well prepared in my childhood. Music was always there in my home. My mother played the piano and sang soprano at church with a tremulo which warbled delightfully a half tone below and above the target note. My father took up painting in his retirement and I have a small gallery of his landscapes on a wall at home.

There was also drama implicit in the charged ritual of the Baptist services. Emotions washed up and down the aisles as the hymn singing reached ecstatic proportions. Adult, or in my case, teenage public baptism by total immersion formed the pinnacle of this religious ecstasy. This symbolic enactment of confession, death of the old self through immersion, followed by salvation expressed in a new life, made an enormous impact on me. I cannot explicitly trace all the resonances it set off, but there was something similar to a sexual frisson in it for a teenage boy.

The minister swung you into the water and back blinking into the light to a chorus of 'Follow, follow I will follow Jesus.' The girls' long white robes had lead weights sown into their hems for propriety but this didn't stop the wet cotton vestments clinging to their breasts as they were pulled up, blinking into the dazzling light of the Kingdom of God.

The church community also offered a readymade captive audience for various performances. There was therefore from an early age both drama and music in my blood.

The story foreshadows some of the aesthetic territory that I now explore in working with groups and in particular in the Learning Disability Service where the main story of my work will be told. I will describe the fascination for this different world in Silver Street which bit by bit has become more of a familiar place, if not a home.

What's in a poem?

(This is another question to which I will return in the thesis and in particular in Chapter 11, 'Poetics in practice'.)

In this small collection of my poems I start with two, which relate to Bath, one written whilst staying there, the other whilst returning home on the train. Writing of this sort has been my way from time to time of standing back from the intensity of some stages in the CARPP process, and reflecting. The trigger for this reflection is always a moment of immediate

sensuous perception, for example, of light on a landscape or the turn of the land in a valley or hill. Such reflections illustrate a recurrent theme in this thesis, of the rootedness of metaphor in sensuous perception.

Above Bath

A reinforcement legion found it to be
just another day,
as they first broached this brow above Aquae Sulis
seeing among the wooded slopes
this same May evening sun,
flecking off different roofs.

How many days' march through Italy and Gaul
To settle in this fold of land,
Until it was all their children ever knew?

And now my dream eye settles upon the city.
The terraces wrap up into the valleys,
Distant dinners made, consumed,
Stories told or censored.

Jackdaws scatter live shadows
across chrome walls
over the slates
into the painful perfection of the sky.

I sit at the window
unravelling my silent song
For this second, I too conquer time,
build colonies of the spirit,
prepare to live more joyfully off the land.

The train from Bath

The landscape is my servant,
smooth as a train window.
Distant Dorset copses
hold the evening air
between Edwardian branches
etched on innocent sky,
before the world grew up.

I give the sweep of land
my langorous wishes,
doing little,
leaving it to hold
what I want,
but you will never know.

The supine breast of a hill
dreams by,
paler than
an Allen Jones,
and is gone.
Philip Glass is writing
the music to this movie window.

Then jump cuts, through Reading,
Slough,
And a slow fade into town.

I have involved two artists in this poem. Allen Jones RA, born in Southampton one year before me, frequently paints the female form in tonally pure pastiches of pin-ups from the fifties/sixties. He breaks out of the image to leave a flare of colour at an incomplete leg or arm. Philip Glass, born in Illinois one year before me, developed a unique style of musical composition based on minimalist techniques. He has written a lot of film music and opera as well as symphonic work. His hallmark – repetitive rhythmic units of sound, suggested him to

me as the musician who might have written the accompaniment to the sound of the train in this summer evening idyll. In noting these references, I am aware of how a work can acquire a complex leverage by tapping into other creative media; but in so doing it may become exclusive. I am particularly aware of this risk in using artworks with groups.

Noting that these two artists were both born in 1937 had the effect momentarily of causing me to wonder what art I have made and make in my life. This writing is my way of slowing down the passage of time, a theme that is explicit or implicit in the remaining three poems in this chapter.

Let sleeping cracks lie

Every other week my mind prepares to mix
a spot of lime mortar to fill up
the crack in the wall,
just a cosmetic job
to deny spiders some territory
– just a way of showing propriety
at the corner of the window frame.

If then one day my hands were to repair the hole,
how long would it be before the living strain in the wall
slowly, politely restored its balance
and handed me back
the natural crack
I'd taken away?

Change is, to quote Beisser's 'paradoxical theory of change',

> **'.... when a person becomes what he or she is, not when he or she tries to become what (s)he is not.' (Beisser, 1970)**

I wrote this poem to say something similar. A colleague of mine chose to take it to a session with some social service senior managers. She later told me how her reading of it had aroused some interesting discussion. "This is what you should be doing more of", she said.

At the time I was pleased, but partly suppressed any further thought of doing this. Like the crack, though, it has resurfaced in a persistent way. (I return to this interest in doing more writing, at the end of the thesis in the coda to Chapter 14, *Conclusion*.)

The lifebelt

This exercise started with a photo that I took over Blackfriars Bridge. I wrote down my immediate thoughts as a prose account on the spot and then worked them into a more poetically structured text. I did this to see what engaged my imagination in making these different representations of the same moment. Below is the photo and overleaf the poem that was prompted by it.

Total immersion

The stairs into water drown my eyes.
I am walking down wet steps beneath the pulpit
into the baptismal pool,
total immersion,
teenage fearful conversion,
then blinking into the lights of watery passion.

Other stairs into the French *citerne*,
used to heave up water for the cows,
bring me to the spot where by repute
a woman drowned.

The photo lies still in my hand
And again my floating eyes feel
the pull of the tide,
the smell of the river,
as I lie tethered to it
by a rope of words. **15/2/06**

Since writing this item I was intrigued to discover that Taylor (2002) includes a photo in a paper entitled, 'Art and Logic in First Person Inquiry: The Synergy of "Both And" '. In it his photo depicts a door leading into a building, which has subsequently been bricked up with breeze blocks. Over the door is a formal notice which announces, 'Receiving'. Taylor invites the reader to consider the felt experience of viewing the picture and compare this with the propositional knowledge might be elicited by answering the question, 'What is this photo about?'.

In this exercise I am very aware of the different aesthetic that springs from these two media. The picture is consumed at a glance. There seems very little gap between what Strati (1999) might call its ontological significance – a life saving device inappropriately left in the water – and its metaphorical and narrative significance responding to the why, how, when of the moment depicted.

The poem uses this imaginative lacuna and begins to fill it with personal associations. It also expresses some of my pleasure in pattern as I found myself fusing with the image in the last stanza. This intuitive and extra-logical connection took me by surprise as I wrote.

Quite an ordinary thing

Death has a place in this contextual account. Baudrillard (1976) describes labour as 'death deferred',

> **'Labour is slow death. This is generally understood in the sense of physical exhaustion. But it must be understood in another sense. Labour is not opposed, like a sort of death, to the 'fulfilment of life', which is an idealist view; labour is opposed *as a slow death* to a violent death .... Labour is opposed as deferred death to the immediate death of sacrifice. (Emphasis in original) (Baudrillard, 1976, translated by I. Grant, 1993, p. 39)**

I certainly have a sense of spending the time that I have through labour, as a slow and irreversible expenditure, which has one inevitable terminus.

Dying is also a metaphor in Elizabethan poetry for the consummation of love, perhaps more like Baudrillard's violent death of momentary sacrifice.

I have recently (2005) lived with the protracted decline towards death of an elderly neighbour, Dennis. I was invited to speak at his funeral. His appreciation of what people strive to be, is still in my voice on occasions as I participate in groups. His reflective pause, the rush from judgement, echo sometimes in my words, – for which I am grateful.

Age and death constitute an occasional theme in my reflection, although not morbidly so. Rather on a good day I see them both as a spur to live as well as I may in the moment.

The poem overleaf strives to defuse the mystery of my own death, although I know of course in that respect it fails!

Quite an ordinary thing

Death's quite an ordinary thing;
it's happening all the while,
sometimes faster,
sometimes slower than birth.

I may just have bought a coat or booked a trip;
others will make a familiar toast
to the unknown days
without me.

When it happens,
I want to be caught in the act,
flagrantly grasping paradox,
dazzled by the darkness of my end,
boundlessly loving
in the confines of a little room,
an awkward one to bury.

Since first drafting this page I was shocked on Monday 29 May, 2006 to receive a phone call from Brussels from the wife of my oldest friend from Cambridge. His name was Paul Bates. Two hours before her call he had just sat up in bed and died with no warning at the age of 66. Paul's memory has followed me around this summer – too young to die, too much left to do. This is my tribute to him. We were young students together and it never crossed my mind that he suddenly would not be there. No other words to add.

Final comments on this chapter

Barthes (1980) captures very well the dilemma of writing commentaries on words and images that should be sufficient in themselves.

'Then I decided that this disorder and this dilemma, revealed by my desire to write on Photography, corresponded to a discomfort I have always suffered from: the uneasiness of being a subject torn between two languages, one expressive, the other critical: and at the

> **heart of this critical language, between several discourses, those of sociology, of semiology, and of psychoanalysis - but that, by ultimate dissatisfaction with all of them, I was bearing witness to the only sure thing that was in me (however naïve it might be): a desperate resistance to any reductive system.' (Barthes, 1980, p.8)**

Hopefully I may avoid this reductive trap, as I briefly reflect below on what I have learnt, in poetically and playfully producing this chapter, about the field in which this inquiry is set.

In bringing together these words and images, I know there is no way to 'capture' experience; accounts of experience spark off new experiences, (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Representation is a selective and imaginative construct that we offer to others in search of some sense of a community of meaning.

In this way the fragmented text, inspired by Marinetti, chopped up so that any propositional meaning falls out of it by chance, may itself be a useful metaphor to hold in mind when working on inquiries. It is not that we perversely aim to confuse in efforts to communicate; but we cannot however claim the label of the one truth for what we recount, draw, photograph, film. The creative choice of the focus, exposure, angle, tracking, zooming, – to stay with the metaphor of film for a moment, – is infinite; and each choice will differently affect the perceiving eye and ear of each individual, to generate new emotions, new ideas.

It is only through a mutual effort to exchange words and images that I construct shared meaning and in the process inevitably create further meanings. It is with such processes of creative learning together that this thesis concerns itself. How can I see more clearly the aesthetic that is already in our practice and how does behaving more consciously within this vision enhance the collaborative knowing that action research aspires to?

In compiling this chapter I am even more aware of the sensuous origin of the bundles of ideas and emotions, which are represented in stories, poems and other dialogues and artworks. The aesthetic forms an essential strand of experiential and presentational knowing in action research. A marker for me in developing this inquiry, is to notice the primacy of this sensory and affective participation with people and places and attend to how this influences the way I work in my practice.

3 A theoretical framework

3 A theoretical framework

Introduction

In this chapter I shall explore some of the writing that has helped me develop a theoretical framework for this inquiry into the theme of the aesthetic in practice. I will do this by,

- reviewing concepts of a participative world with particular reference to the work of Gregory Bateson
- reviewing some of the literature relating to perception and phenomenology with particular reference to Merleau-Ponty
- making a connection between phenomenology and action research
- defining some of the action research processes, which will feature in my inquiry.

The connecting theme in considering each of these theoretical areas is their relationship with the aesthetic, both in my own practice and in the way it influences my work with others.

Firstly then I shall trace some of the ways in which literature drawn from a participative paradigm has influenced my life and practice.

I want to enter into this theoretical territory through the portal of a reflexive account of an experience and then show how practice moments such as these connect with a participative worldview.

journal ... Interface, 4/1/06

I notice how quite a lot is happening around the edges of concrete paving slabs below my window.

Bateson regarded interfaces between systems of mind as important places for connection and transmission. In the Esalen tapes he refers to the edge of a forest or the borders of a swamp, as being a place where living systems respond to the 'news of difference' as different ecologies relate.

In practice terms I notice in Silver Street how stepping across the boundary between the enclosed world of the day centre and going out into the community with staff and people who use the service, provoked this news of difference. There is greater liveliness amongst people and they in turn trigger off a range of responses from passers-by, some closed and unhelpful, others open and warm.

> Also a lot often seems to happen in groups when a time boundary approaches. The conclusion of the final meeting[3] in my first piece of work in Silver Street staff shows this. The imminence of the end of the session sparked off a remarkable statement by Teresa about the value to her of working in the centre.
>
> In preparing ourselves to part, we scrabble around to achieve some sense of completion of **this**, before moving on to **that**. In Teresa's case she articulated her deep satisfaction with her work over many years with people with profound physical and learning disabilities. The sight of the end of the session contributed to her releasing this creative energy. It also evidenced the attentive and participative nature of this group encounter, which allowed her to find her voice.

In developing this concept of the news of difference, Bateson identifies adaptive interactions that occur at all levels throughout the participative universe. This might be in nature in such complex systems as weather or the growth of plants and animals. It might be embedded in the responses to difference that occur in human relationships. It is an idea that I shall draw on regularly throughout this thesis in describing changes we experience in making and responding to the play and poetics in practice.

The participatory universe

As Abram (1996) observes, experiential knowing is the subjective source of our constructs of the world.

> **'Our spontaneous experience of the world, charged with subjective, emotional, and intuitive content remains the vital and dark ground of all our objectivity.' (Abram, 1996, p. 34)**

The belief that I have come to hold is that we live in a creative human ecology that participates in a larger cosmic ecology, (Bateson, 1972). For me this has meant striving to be more attuned to processes of emergence through participation, in my personal vision, in practice with others, in aesthetic or spiritual experience and in being more respectful of the natural universe.

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[3] An account of this meeting can be found later in Chapter 6, *How does working in this way influence others?*

'Life behaves in messy ways. It succeeds in creating, responding and adapting by using processes that have no connection to our machine-led ways of thinking. In a living system, what is redundant? How can anyone know? Life doesn't pursue parsimony.'
(Wheatley, 1996, p. 24)

'Despite all their efforts to contain it, the ragwort got away'

It is a consistent theme in the writings of Bateson, Skolimowski and Capra, that there is a creative purpose is at the centre of this evolutionary process. As Skolimowski (1994) says,

'Unwrapping the sense of human meaning leads us directly to the idea of the universe that is endowed with purpose. But more than just any purpose, a transcendent purpose, a purpose touching on the sacred.' (Skolimowski,1994, p. 254).

Bateson contrasts transcendent purpose with 'conscious purposefulness', which he saw to be an imposition of mechanistic processes on the world. In the 1960s he acquired an interest in the study of communication and learning in animals, particularly in octopuses, dolphins and porpoises. Through this study he was already becoming increasingly aware of the damaging ecological impact that our conscious purposefulness was having on the world.

'Today the purposes of consciousness are implemented by more and more effective machinery, transportation systems, airplanes, weaponry, medicine, pesticides, and so forth. Conscious purpose is now empowered to upset the balances of the body, of society, and

> **of the biological world around us. A pathology – a loss of balance – is threatened.'**
> **(Bateson, 1972, p. 440)**

He saw that this loss of balance could not be resolved within a dualistic paradigm of man and nature, where humankind was seen as a separate subject, seeking to analyse and control nature, as its object.

Over the last ten years I have become increasingly drawn to Bateson's work and now briefly offer a summary of some of the ways in which it has become a foundational reference in my thinking about the aesthetic in practice.

An ecology of mind

I was privileged this year (2006) to attend a centenary celebration of Bateson's birth, held at the Tavistock Institute and which had as its principal guest, his daughter, Professor Mary Catherine Bateson. She made a presentation and I had a short conversation with her at the reception afterwards. No doubt as a consequence of some principle of proxemics, my having met her contributed to the further animation of Bateson's work for me. I had also over the last few weeks been reading Noel Charlton's Lancaster unpublished PhD thesis, (2003) entitled *A Sacred World: the Ecology of Mind, Aesthetics and Grace in the Thought of Gregory Bateson*, in a copy sent to me by Peter Reason.

Charlton (2003) devotes a chapter of his thesis to Bateson's thinking on the place of aesthetics within the complex ecology of mind that for Bateson is the universe. Charlton painstakingly pieces together evidence of Bateson's growing conviction that it was only through our aesthetic engagement with nature and art that we can reconnect with the sacred ecology of the universe. For Bateson this meant to step away from the damage inflicted on the universe by the 'conscious purposefulness' of mankind and to step, through aesthetic knowing, towards the sacred. By the term 'the sacred' he means 'Reverential Monism' or a belief in the presence of God in all living systems.

Bateson's trajectory as a thinker, writer and teacher is remarkable in that he chose during his life to pursue his inquiry through many academic disciplines, including anthropology, cybernetics, psychiatry, genetics and communication theory.

In 1972 he published *Steps in an Ecology of Mind*, subsequently republished after his death in 2000 with a new foreword by his daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson. This drew together a

wide range of his writing, from the early metalogues to work written shortly before his death in 1980 and established his place as a significant twentieth century thinker. The publication in 1979 of his work *Mind and Nature: a Necessary Unity* further spread his influence. *Angels fear: an Investigation into the Nature and Meaning of the Sacred* was his last and incomplete work, which was subsequently finished and published by his daughter in 1987.

Given this evolving portfolio of inquiries it is perhaps not surprising that many who have not travelled on the same journey find Bateson somewhat inaccessible. However there are strong unifying themes that run through his work. Since these provide me with part of my ontological framework for thinking about the aesthetic in practice, I will summarise some of the most important of them. In doing so I acknowledge the work of Charlton (2003) who through his exhaustive analysis of all of Bateson's two hundred and twenty eight published papers, speeches and books, has helped elucidate these influential concepts.

Firstly Bateson's ontology is based on his notion of 'mind' which is radically different from popular anthropocentric understandings of the word. He does not conceive of mind as being solely resident within people, a product of a thinking brain. Rather he defines mind as a living information flow within a system that may be found in many different organisms from the microscopic bacterial level to large organic systems in nature.

In his later writing Bateson (1972) identified six criteria by which it was possible to confirm the existence of 'mind'. (Where they are obscure or unclear, I have added illustrative examples from Charlton, 2003.) They are:

> **'1 A mind is an aggregate of interacting parts or components.**
>
> **2 *The interaction between parts of mind is triggered by difference* and difference is a non substantial phenomenon not located in space or time; difference is related to negentropy and entropy rather than to energy.**
>
> **Charlton gives illustrations of this criterion as,**
> **'a change in environment, movement of another organism, growth in the system itself, a verbal message, a shift in rhythm, the 'feel' of a surface, a contrast of colour or texture, a trick of perspective.....' (Charlton 2003, p 126)**
>
> **3 Mental process requires collateral energy.**

Bateson gives as an example a situation where if you kick a dog, the information of your intentions is in the kick, but the energy with which the dog responds comes from the dog. Together dog and person make up a 'mind'.

4 Mental process requires circular (or more complex) chains of determination.

Charlton gives illustrations of this criterion as,
'cells, plants, animals, groups, evolving species, ecosystems - or artists (painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers, poets or 'natural historians') in interaction with their surroundings.' (Ibid., p. 125)

5 In mental process, the effects of difference are to be regarded as transforms (i.e. coded versions of events which preceded them). The rules of such transformation must be comparatively stable (i.e. more stable than the content) but are themselves subject to transformation.

Charlton gives illustrations of this criterion as,
'neural 'impulses' reporting 'hot' about your fingertip to your brain, a chemical message penetrating the membrane of a cell, a warning shout coded in English language, a smell of 'fox' alarming a grazing rabbit, a fall in popularity coded as questionnaire responses influencing a government's spin doctors, a painting which communicates a sense of calm to the viewer, a change of tempo, dynamics or key in a symphony or the changing light on a landscape.' (Ibid., p. 127)

6 The description and classification of these processes of transformation disclose a hierarchy of logical types immanent in the phenomena.' (Bateson, 1972, p. 92)

On this last criterion Charlton explains that each mind is 'nested' within larger mental systems and may contain smaller identifiable minds.

He makes the point that all of these criteria have to be met in order to attribute the Batesonian term 'mind' to a system. The relevance of these criteria to understanding of aesthetic processes is very strong, as Charlton's illustrations make clear. Criterion 2, for example, is concerned with interactions triggered by differences such as sensory perception

of a surface. Criterion 5, which describes the effects of difference as 'transforms', may include the sense of calm communicated by a painting, or by a change of key in a symphony.

Bateson is here exploring the systemic processes of aesthetic experience and their consequences in the mind of human interaction.

I want now to feature some aspects of Bateson's ecology and show how they relate to and inform my practice. Again I enter this ground through an observation recorded in a photo and included in my journal.

journal ... The news of difference

Walking in the park I came upon this scene that I chose to photograph. It seemed to me like a marvellously given example of the concept of news of difference.

The stones were cut from granite; as sets, their pattern together express the irregularity of the rock but it is their loose curved relationship which identifies them as a path. The pattern of the bars is straight, machine-made and set vertically between horizontal steel railings.

> Together they form a system for supporting and containing the passage of people, vehicles or animals.
>
> It was however the visual impact of the changing life force of the sun which drove me to take this picture.
>
> Through this pattern and structure, sunlight, and its absence as shadow, flow without changing the pattern or the structure. But in Bateson's terms there is a news of difference in the way this happens, as the earth turns, or the sun is obscured by cloud. The inevitable consequence is that an aesthetic image is available to the viewer, if they choose to see it. It is brought to life by my perceiving it through the lens of my camera and now its representation to my journal.

Charlton comments that the interactions promote *learning in the system*, involve *memory* and result in *knowing*, all of these defined in much broader terms than those we usually apply to such concepts. He adds,

> **'Similarly in art: a group of painters, writers or musicians may develop a distinctive style as they view and remember each other's works or performances and their patrons or peers respond with approval or otherwise.' (Charlton, 2003. p. 127)**

This model of the development of knowing can equally be applied to the processes of learning that goes on in my practice encounters. It is encapsulated in the moment when I caught the radiant smile of Lorraine at Silver Street, I having started to varnish her nails. (See Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.) Both she and I noticed considerable news of differences; it was that which caused the smile. We both learned about the encounter and it entered deeply into my memory, and probably hers, I shall never know. Its aesthetic impact shifted my knowing of Silver Street and drew on many other connections and feelings.

In addition this learning, these memories and this knowing, enter further cycles of 'mind' when we represent them in storytelling, image, dance, music or picture, all of which have the potential to transcend description and move into poetry.

Pattern, structure and life force

In what might be regarded as a further extension of Bateson's participative ontology, the theory of autopoesis, or self-making or organising, needs some brief reference. Capra (1997) draws on the work of Maturana and Varela (1987), as well as that of Bateson, in distinguishing between pattern, structure and life process. *Pattern* in their terms is the configuration of relationships that determines the system's essential characteristics. Without this it would not be recognisable for what it is. Thus a bike has two wheels, pedals and a saddle, etcetera and is therefore categorised within the type of 'bike'. *Structure* is the 'physical embodiment of the system's pattern of organization'; there are many kinds and shapes of bike, for example. *Life process* is 'the `activity involved in the continuing embodiment of the system's pattern of organization'.

In his treatment of pattern Capra (1997) includes reference to the development of Gestalt theory and subsequent therapeutic practice, in his panoramic survey of the rise of systems thinking.

> **'The notion of pattern was always implicit in the writings of the gestalt psychologists, who often used the analogy of musical theme that can be played in different keys without losing its essential features.' (Capra, 1997 p. 32)**

This unchanging identity or essence of an artwork through its different representations had also earlier interested Gadamer, (1975).

In practice, these concepts of pattern, structure and life flow coming together in autopoesis have profound implications for the way I work with groups and individuals. I find myself drawing on Gestalt perspectives in trying to understand recurrent patterns of behaviour. The *pattern* of co-inquiry sessions can be described as the relationships between elements in its pre-design – introduction, small group, plenary, for example. These are what make it recognisable as *this* sort of session, as distinct from *other* meetings people might have. Its particular *structure* as an event is a consequence of the individuals who enter the room and participate. They generate a life force of self-organising through the flows of their dialogue and action, just as the sun expresses itself in light and shade as it hits and moves across the pattern and structure it encounters.

At a deep level this seems to me to one expression of the aesthetic of encounters, as feelings and ideas find representation in different forms. It is in the unfolding and self-organising of

sessions that an aesthetic is generated and people influence each other and are influenced. The facilitator role also influences, and is influenced within the system.

The aesthetic as a route to the sacred

Bateson in his ecology of mind posits multiple levels of connectivity and participation throughout the universe. Within this web of connectivity he sees the aesthetic as having a crucial role to play in re-establishing our links with 'grace'. In Charlton's illustrative examples of mind referred to earlier in this chapter, artistic processes feature alongside biological and social ones. There are also examples of difference stemming from changes in the way we observe, and are moved by, light falling across landscape. Bateson sets in contrast these forms of aesthetic connection in nature and art, with the conscious purposefulness that the human race imposes on nature.

This links for me with action research approaches which do not operate through the purposeful, as expressed in action plans and 'rolled out' programmes, but through relational and connective ways of sharing and generating direction based on cycles of action and reflection. (I shall spell out more fully how I understand and work within an action research approach later in this chapter.)

Bateson sees the recovery of grace through the aesthetic as a pathway to a new sense of the sacred. This is a theme that is central to the establishment of an ontological basis for my choice of aesthetics in practice as the subject for this thesis.

By providing so graphic a vision of nested living systems within the larger universal system, Bateson encourages us to rediscover the deep ecology of interconnection between the natural world and our own inherent recognition of beauty. Moreover he establishes the place of art as a connective process that can align us more closely with nature. In his recognition of a reverential form of monism he acknowledges a spiritual dimension to his worldview. Any ontology which denies the possibility of this dimension of human experience would be at odds with the intuitive and spiritual nature of my own inquiry.

Bateson's vision of a participative ecological mind has been profoundly influential on me for the last ten years and provides an ontological framework of this inquiry. In his life and work he spans worlds of inquiry which are normally divided into separate categories. Art, science and the sacred come together to inform his discovery of steps to an ecology of mind.

Phenomenology

In the second part of this chapter I turn to phenomenology and in particular the work of Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty, in whose thought I have found another crucial dimension of my theoretical framework. As an introduction to my discussion of phenomenology I draw on an account in an experienced moment in my 2004 journal.

journal ... Three cormorants 12/6/04

'The wind is partner to airborne seeds; that's how last summer's unforeseen gifts of valerian, snapdragon and Canterbury bell seeds, find themselves growing now in profusion out of the walls and flagstones below my window. There is a random profusion at work in the system of the garden, in the lanes and fields – 'system' seems too dry a term. Even in London, a supreme testimony to how humans can overlay nature, it's not just Wordsworth who could have wept at the light off the Thames towards Westminster.

Three cormorants fly high against threatening clouds and sketch a line across St Paul's dome. The energy of the streets, of so much that people do to shape their lives, is also woven into this ecology. A face passes by, with a lifetime's respect and quality folded into its features, the hint of a smile, the bearing, the thoughts that flicker behind the eyes. A child runs rather than walks because she is already where she aims to be; it's just a matter of getting the legs and feet there too.

I realise that I have been drawn in my thinking and writing over many years to explore the immediacy and sensory impact of moments such as these. Experiential knowing is the fertile source of all other forms of knowing.'

This journal item preceded my reading of phenomenological texts and yet I now notice in the detail of the child's running and the observation of the women's face, ideas of embodiment,

which belong to a phenomenological discourse. I also notice a link between these examples and Bateson; much of this imagery might also illustrate his criteria for mind.

In introducing some concepts of phenomenological thinking I want briefly to set this significant school of thought in context. Throughout the twentieth century, thinkers have explored and challenged the deep-rooted dualism of the prevailing positivist worldview that they inherited. Bateson developed the concept of the participative ecology of mind outlined in the first part of this chapter. Phenomenologist thinkers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty each in their different ways explored consciousness and posited new participative relationships between phenomena and the minds that perceive them.

Phenomenological approaches to aesthetic knowing attempt to describe participation between the sentient individual and the experiential world. Abram (1997) refers to the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945, translated in 1962) in seeing participation as an active and unavoidable part of perception. Husserl (1970) also establishes the participative nature of knowing through doing.

Abram (1997) draws on phenomenological thinking in developing his account of a participative and sensuous universe, with which he claims we have lost connection through our ways of living in the Western world.

> **'We always retain the ability to alter or suspend any particular instance of participation. Yet we never suspend the flux of participation itself.' (Abram, 1997, p. 59)**

The nature of our connection with a participatory universe is described by Heron and Reason (1997, p. 279) as 'Subjective-Objective'. Citing Heron (1996), they explain,

> **'It is subjective because it is only known through the form the mind gives it; and it is objective because the mind interpenetrates the given cosmos which it shapes.' (Heron, 1996, p.11)**

Another way of expressing this relationship is to regard the cosmos as **'given, a primordial reality'** and what we experience as reality, as **'the fruit of an interaction of the given cosmos and the way the mind engages with it.' (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 279)**

Heron and Reason's (1997) view, already referenced in Chapter 1, is that experiential knowing acts as the ground for a an extended epistemology.

> **'... our attempts at aware everyday living all convince us that experiential encounter with the presence of the world is the ground of our being and knowing. This encounter is prior to language and art – although it can be symbolized in language and art.' (Ibid., p. 276)**

Or again,

> **'To experience anything is to participate in it, and to participate is both to mould and to encounter; hence experiential reality is always subjective-objective.' (Ibid., p. 278)**

Referencing Husserl and Merleau-Ponty they affirm that,

> **'The empirical is based on experience, and it ceases to be empirical when experience is constrained by a restricting definition.' (Ibid., p. 276)**

Phenomenological approaches to the aesthetic in practice have offered me many insights into the perceptual stages of both personal reflexive inquiry and shared inquiry with others. It was as if I had discovered a legitimisation for many of the observations that draw my eye or attract my senses.

In engaging with the extensive field of phenomenological thinking, I have found the work of Merleau-Ponty and Gadamer particularly resonant with my own reflections on practice. I therefore now point up some of the ways in which this writing has relevance for my inquiry. In so doing I am indebted to Moran's extensive and accessible guide to phenomenology (2000) and Sokolowski's work (2000), which focuses on the principal ideas of the phenomenologists as a group, whilst, somewhat tantalisingly, infrequently attributing ideas to specific philosophers. However, read in tandem the two works provide an invaluable entrée to this complex but fascinating area of twentieth century thought.

Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty sadly died in 1961 of a stroke, at the early age of 53. It is thought by Moran (2000) that he might otherwise have become even more of an influence on the development of twentieth century philosophy. His writing opens up for me a new and deeper awareness of the phenomenon of perception. The particular contribution that Merleau-Ponty makes to an understanding of perception is that he sees it as a participative and embodied process between the perceiver and the perceived. In his terms, 'returning to the things themselves', or also the people themselves, is to re-discover a participative dialogue with the world. He also locates experiential knowing as preceding propositional knowing.

> **'All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless.**
>
> ...
>
> **To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*, and in relation to which every scientific schematization is an abstract and derivative sign-language, as in geography in relation to the countryside in which we have learnt beforehand what a forest, a prairie or a river is.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. viii-ix)**

In Moran's words, Merleau-Ponty saw human experience as,

> **'an immensely complex weave of consciousness, body and environment, best approached in terms of a holistic philosophy.' (Moran, 2000, p. 413)**

Merleau-Ponty's aim, declared in the 'Structure of Behaviour' (1942, translated 1963) was,

> **'to understand the relations of consciousness and nature: organic, psychological or even social. By nature we understand here the multiplicity of events external to each other and bound together by relations of causality.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1942, translated 1963, p. 3)**

It is not surprising that an early influence on Merleau-Ponty came via the German Gestalt theorists, Gelb and Goldstein. He rejected behaviourism and its opposite, idealism, neither

of which presented him with a coherent account of the world as he perceived it. In a metaphorical way which is typical of his writing, he claims that behaviour should be seen as,

> **'... a kinetic melody gifted with meaning.' (Ibid.,1942, translated in1963, p.130)**

His understanding of perception is that it is always fully embodied and 'grounded in our corporeal nature.'

> **'I have tried, first of all, to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world, going against doctrines which treat perception as a simple result of the action of external things on our body as well as against those which insist on the autonomy of consciousness.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, translated in1964, pp. 3-4)**

He focuses on this embodied origin of communication,

> **'It is the body which points out and speaks ... our gaze, prompted by the experience of the whole sensible world, and our gaze, prompted by the experience of our own body, will discover in all other "objects" the miracle of expression.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 197)**

I think of the physicality of my response to moments of practice with others. Later in Chapter 4, *Inquiry approaches and methods* I describe an occasion in a park when I began to reach out towards the recumbent figure on the park bench, my having seen a wet paint sign above him. The energy and tempo of group interaction expresses itself in physical postures and responses. I know too how music can stir the body and raise the pulse.

Moran (2000) offers an intriguing illustration of how Merleau-Ponty came to think of perception,

> **'Thus in discussing the way in which we prepare our bodies for sleep, by lying down, relaxing, curling up, or whatever, we 'invite' sleep which comes to us not by an explicit conscious willing on our part but not entirely without our participation either. The ambiguity of our attitude in the case of sleep is indicative of the whole complex nature of our embodiment.' (Moran, 2000, p. 423)**

Phenomenology offers a return to a form of naïve connectivity, before cultural and social filters overlaid our interpretation of the world. In this way I find greater understanding of the

importance to me of 'the thing in itself', be it a smile or expression, a turn of phrase, spoken or musical.

Phenomenology and Action research

Ladkin (2005) develops a connection between what Husserl described as this 'enigma of subjectivity' and the challenge of retaining critical subjectivity in action research. (I shall elaborate further on the concept of critical subjectivity and action research, in the last part of this chapter.) She identifies three common threads of phenomenological thinking which have particular relevance to issues of subjectivity in action research,

> **'A placing of importance on the day-to-day world in which we live, rather than the abstracted world of scientific measurement and principles.**
>
> **The importance of doing in developing knowing – the stance that there are certain things which can only be known through their enactment.**
>
> **An aim to apprehend the world in a way which reveals its truth, and acknowledging the way in which our subjectivity contributes to that truth.' (Ladkin, 2005, p. 112)**

I connect with the first focus on perceptual engagement with the day-to-day world and the participative nature of this engagement. Acute observation of the moment is a vital part of practice. As I have written the journals on which this thesis is based, I have striven to capture not only the detail of the moment, but also my own reflexive awareness of being in that moment. The case of nail painting in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*, is an example. A meta-layer of this critical awareness of subjectivity is to explore the metaphorical lenses through which the participation occurs, (Morgan, 1986). I can only ever be partially aware of such filters, given their longevity and embodiedness in me. It is then only through inquiry with others that I may become more open to dialogic insights into the blindnesses that have become a part of my hermeneutic response to the world.

Argyris and Schon (1990) also refer to this filtering process and the difficulty of knowing what you don't know through solitary reflection without the help from others. As a result of such shared inquiry it is possible to begin to identify some of the edges of this unknown. In particular they draw attention to differences at a cognitive level between what they refer to as 'espoused theories' and 'theories in use', which are evidenced through the way we act.

Similarly in phenomenological thinking, Husserl refers to 'intersubjectivity', or the sharing of individual subjective experience with others, as a way out of solipsism and the assumed division of thought into subjective and objective, enshrined in positivist thinking. (Moran illustrates and contrasts Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of intersubjectivity. For Sartre, **'Hell was other people'**, whereas for Merleau-Ponty, **'History is other people.'** Moran [2000], p. 420)

On the second of Ladkin's points the emphasis on knowing through embodied action addresses a whole experiential area for me of participating in processes and ideas, which become in essence part of me through action. This can be experienced at several levels. The bodily awareness of starting to speak to an unknown group that I refer to in Chapter 6, *How does working in this way influence others?*, at the start of my volunteering there, is one example. Until I had experienced it, I did not know how I stood in relation to this new community. Another is the knowledge which is in my left hand of how rapidly to drum my fingers, having learnt to play a violin at an early age; my right hand cannot do this as it has always held the bow; the same would be true in reverse.

The third of Ladkin's attributions to a phenomenological stance, – the way the world offers us its truths, confirms a significant ontological shift for me over many years from a dependency on notions of external and validated truth to the lively localised creation of truths through participation in the world. This connects for me with the notion of critical subjectivity, as used in an action research context, and implies a discipline of reflexive awareness of individual contributions to the shared meaning-making in the moment.

The connection between phenomenonology and action research outlined here by Ladkin and referred to earlier in the work of Reason and Heron confirmed my choice of an action research approach to this inquiry. I shall now therefore conclude this chapter by filling in some detail to my earlier introduction of action research in Chapter 1, *Introduction*.

Action research as a participative framework

I offer a definition of a number of key terms relating to action research, as they will feature in later accounts of my practice.

Critical subjectivity

As has been mentioned above, Heron and Reason (1997) talk of a subjective-objective ontology as the basis for a participative worldview and suggest that the researcher needs to develop a discipline of critical subjectivity. Their paper positions participatory research in

relation to other research approaches such as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory or constructivism. The concept of a subjective-objective ontology is one of the key differentiators between participatory research and the other approaches described, in that it attends to the primacy of the experiential knowing, whether in the relationship between the researcher and their participating co-researchers, or their shared encounter with what it is they have chosen to explore.

This articulation of the participative experiential connection of researcher and researched was a tremendous liberation for me. I felt that it legitimized not just the experience of the relating but also it opened up further inquiry into the intensely subjective/objective discipline of expressive representation of these experiences.

An extended epistemology

Another essential strand to the Action Research approach can be found in Heron and Reason's (1997) definition of an extended epistemology which distinguishes between four types of knowing:

> Experiential knowing – **'direct encounter, face-to-face meeting: feeling and imaging the presence of some energy, entity, person, place, process, or thing'**.
>
> Presentational knowing – this is **'evident in an intuitive grasp of the significance of our resonance with and imaging of our world as this grasp is symbolised in graphic, plastic, musical, vocal and verbal art forms'**.
>
> Propositional knowing – **'knowing in conceptual terms that something is the case; knowledge by description of some energy, entity, person, place, process, or thing'**.
>
> Practical knowing – **'knowing how to do something, demonstrated by a skill or competence'. (Heron and Reason, 1997, pp. 280-281)**

The writers show how all forms of knowing are co-dependent. Of particular interest in this context is the connection between experiential knowing and presentational knowing which they describe as an 'intuitive grasp' of the resonances with the world and our imaging of it. This intuitive grasp relates closely to what I have described above as experiencing an *intrinsic* aesthetic. In talking of imaging this grasp through symbolic art forms, the writers are describing what I have referred to above as an *expressive* aesthetic.

Heron and Reason also stress that just as experiential knowing is the ground of an extended epistemology, so practical knowing is its culmination and constitutes the celebration of the other three types of knowing. In my case through this inquiry I am seeking greater practical knowing about my way of working and being with others. In doing this I am at the same time exploring with others practical knowing on a range of issues identified by us as important.

My early connections with Bath and other members of the CARPP community validated experientially the potential of working through these four ways of knowing. There was a ready acceptance within the CARPP community that it is possible to explore experience individually and in groups through ways which may sometimes be propositional but equally may be presentational or practical. This widening of the bandwidth of what counts for meaningful knowing provided me with a contribution to the framework I needed, to pursue this inquiry.

First, second and third person inquiry

Action Research is seen to operate in three different but related modes, referred to as first, second and third person inquiry. Through first person inquiry into my own practice as a facilitator at Silver Street and elsewhere, I hope to identify what theories about the aesthetic in practice matter to me in enacting my role. Through cycles of reflection and action my intention has been to improve my practice. I have used a second person approach to my inquiry questions, as and when it was appropriate to do so, bearing in mind that my research interests were not high on the agendas of those with whom I worked. This informal second person inquiry often took the form of conversations with people who had read my journals and wanted to respond to them.

However in working on Silver Street inquiry questions such as finding ways of developing a more person-centred approach to service delivery, I will show how I have used forms of cooperative second person inquiry. In parallel with this I continued my own first person inquiry into the aesthetic in practice.

Third person inquiry describes that process of reaching beyond first and second to engage with larger communities of inquiry. I shall have an opportunity to use some of my work in this way this autumn (2006) when I run a session at the Third International Conference on Art and Management in Krakow. There will also be other expanding networks of connection around Silver Street as I feed back elements of my inquiry to spark off further reflection and action in this community.

As Torbert asserts,

> **'First-, second- and third-person research/practice mutually generate, require and reinforce one another because each is the preparation to welcome rather than resist timely transformation, at the personal, relational and organizational scale, respectively.' (Torbert, 2001, p.258)**

In addressing these fundamental issues about the nature of participative inquiry, a number of related issues begin to fall into place. For example, the axiological question within participative inquiry, – what is intrinsically worthwhile?

What is intrinsically worthwhile?

The issues of value and validity need to be addressed in defending an action research approach; they also connect to the question of purpose – why is this inquiry being pursued? If we talk, as the literature does, of action research being essentially for the support of human flourishing, how will such flourishing be identified and valued?

Heron and Reason (1997) point to the necessary inclusion of the axiology question to complement the questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology which Guba and Lincoln (1989) saw as forming the basic anatomy of inquiry. Heron and Reason observe that usually the first value question raised is about the value of knowledge. This Aristotelian position has led to a pursuit of intellectual excellence **'in damaging dissociation from feeling, imagination and action'** (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 287). By contrast they declare that the participatory paradigm answers the axiological question in terms of,

> **'human flourishing, conceived of as an end in itself, where such flourishing is construed as an enabling balance within and between people of hierarchy, cooperation and autonomy.' (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 287)**

As Heron (1989) neatly summarised it, this enabling balance was a matter of finding an appropriate integration of these three principles,

> **'deciding for others, with others and for oneself.' (Heron 1989, cited in Heron and Reason, 1997, p.287)**

This is a construct which only acquires fuller meaning through action. For example, the issue of hierarchy is constantly open to question in groups who have expectations of dependency on the leadership dimension of the facilitator role.

At its most extreme this becomes a sacrifice by some or all participants of their individual autonomy and leads to a breakdown in collaboration. Working out this enabling balance is a live and continuous process which is both challenging and unfamiliar for many groups. This issue is explored in detail later in the second piece of Silver Street work in Part C.

The connection between how we know the world and what actions flow from this knowledge is the vital core of action research. Heron and Reason reaffirm this link,

> **'Our knowing of the world is consummated as our action in the world, and participatory research is thus essentially transformative.' (Ibid., p. 288)**

Cycles of action and reflection

Another action research theme which has been influential in my changing practice concerns a commitment to inquire, on the basis of reflection on action. This way of working involves attending to and developing cycles of action and reflection (Heron and Reason 1997) and depends on the belief that solutions unfold and are generated from within groups of participative individuals, rather than their being imported from outside.

Schon (1983) had earlier confirmed the value of action-based inquiry into professional change,

> **'the unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it, and changed through the attempt to understand it.' (Schon, 1983, p. 132)**

As Heron and Reason (1997) make clear, the extended epistemology becomes whole and purposeful in action. My purpose in making this inquiry has increasingly focused on understanding better how aesthetic representations offer space and time to negotiate new meanings and take different and potentially transformative actions. I will show how my inquiry moves first of all into deepening my own level of awareness of play and the poetic that, I argue, is intrinsic to all practice, and then towards an exploration of expressive aesthetic forms within that practice.

Conclusion

As Catherine Bateson (1987) points out, the edges between ontology and epistemology in any philosophical inquiry may become blurred. In pursuing the theme of participation through this chapter I have been concerned with a broad vision of universal ecology and in particular I have drawn on Bateson's concept of an ecology of mind. However as Bateson's work makes clear this broad ecology is generated from many smaller nested minds within it. In describing some aspects of Merleau-Ponty's intensely focused return to the being itself, I have been thinking in a more epistemological way on processes through which I know the world.

Both stances inform the theoretical framework within which I shall pursue this inquiry.

My inquiry into Bateson started with the image of luxuriant moss between paving stones as an example of the news of difference at the interface between Batesonian minds. Drawing on Charlton's research into the place of the aesthetic in Bateson's work, I featured a number of aspects, which relate to my own inquiry.

Bateson identified 'conscious purposefulness' as a form of human interference in the world's ecology, which even then in 1960 was having destructive effects.

Having referenced the main features of Bateson's concept of mind, I introduced an aesthetic exploration of the news of difference through commentary on a photo of railings in the park. This lead to a reference to Capra, (1997) and his account of pattern, structure and life force in autopoesis.

I concluded this section by noting that Bateson saw the aesthetic as a pathway to the recovery of 'grace' and a re-discovery of the sacred.

Changing focus I then turned to my developing interest in phenomenology and in particular discussed some of the key aspects of Merleau-Ponty's contribution to this philosophical school. The discussion was introduced by a journal extract entitled 'Three cormorants', which was written just before I started to read phenomenology texts. I made connections with other writers including Abram, Heron and Reason, who have confirmed my interest in phenomenology.

In discussing the work of Merleau-Ponty I featured his focus on the immediacy of sensory perception,

> **'To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, of which knowledge always *speaks*'**

Finally I returned to action research as a significant theoretical framework for me. Referencing Ladkin (2005) I traced some of the connections between the enigma of subjectivity as discussed in the work of Husserl and other phenomenologists, and the practice of action research.

I concluded by outlining a number of action research themes that will be referred to later in the thesis.

In the next chapter the emphasis moves to the choices in approach and methodology that I have made in this inquiry, particularly with regard to working in Silver Street.

Working sketch – 'A hard thing to undo this knot'

In reading the poem below, I remind myself of the value of aesthetic inquiry into the aesthetic. Hopkins' poem captures the phenomenological moment of each person's different perception of a rainbow.

Rainbows

By Gerald Manley Hopkins

It was a hard thing to undo this knot.
The rainbow shines, but only in the thought
Of him who looks. Yet not in that alone,
For who makes rains by invention?
And many standing round a waterfall
See one bow each, yet not the same for all,
But each a handsbreadth further than the next.
The sun on falling waters writes the text
Which yet is in the eye or in the thought.
It was a hard thing to undo this knot.

'The sun on the water writing the text', – this is pure Bateson.

As I continue to write, I will hold Hopkins image of the rainbow in mind. Rather than seeking to untie this knot, I hope to understand better how inextricably interwoven the rainbow, the eye and the thought are.

4 Inquiry methods

4 Inquiry methods

Introduction

In this final chapter of Part A I give an account of the methods which I have developed as my inquiry progressed. In doing this I continue the line of Part A which is to provide a theoretical framework and personal context to the subsequent reading of the thesis.

I intend therefore to,

- show how the nature of this inquiry influenced my choice of methodology
- describe and illustrate how I use my writing as the basis for reflexive analysis and sense-making
- describe and illustrate the place of photography as a complementary medium in this process
- consider the research design implications of making Silver Street the main location of my inquiry
- explain the main structural choices I have made in organizing the material within this thesis.

The relationship between inquiries and the chosen inquiry methodologies was touched on in a reference to Shotter (1993) in the working sketch that followed Chapter 1, *Introduction*. There he warned against the risk that the metamethodology or process of 'socially constructing' inquiry narratives may distract from the metatheory, or purpose of the research. I therefore preface my description of methods, by pausing to take stock of the nature of this inquiry and to focus briefly on the main pathways that emerge during it.

The nature of this inquiry

I have been drawn to two central dimensions or themes of the aesthetic in practice; these are *play* and *poetics*. I now briefly refer to these two themes, as they have defined the nature of this inquiry.

Play

My interest in play grew as I began to think of the aesthetic as a dynamic and transactional process. My attention was drawn to the dramatic unfolding of engagements and the way this influenced perceptions and feelings, both mine and those of others in the group. This is an area to which many different theoretical lenses of group interaction might be applied.

However, from an aesthetic perspective, theories relating to play, both as games, (Huizinga, 1938 and Caillois, 1958), and as theatre, (Gadamer, 1975), opened up potential interpretative models for my inquiry.

Huizinga and Caillois see play as an experience that is pervasive in all human encounters. They substantiate this claim by drawing on extensive anthropological and historical evidence. From this, Huizinga (1938) identifies the central place of contest and chance in play. Caillois (1958) includes these in a set of four 'dispositions' or types of play in his own theoretical account.

The four types can be summarised as follows,

> Agon, contest, is play in which the player wants to win by merit, under regulated conditions.
>
> Alea, chance, is play in which the player wins by chance or luck, as in a game of dice.
>
> Mimesis, illusion, is play in which the player adopts another personality in an imaginary universe.
>
> Ilinx, carnival, is play in which the player desires ecstasy, unboundness, and freedom. (Ilinx is the Greek word for whirlpool.)

In making sense of the improvisatory flow of interactions, this typology of play proved to be invaluable. It helped me tap into the nature of the dramatic energy that I experienced in groups. Gadamer's (1975) incorporation of theatre into his commentary on play further extended the range of interpretative structures that I could bring to the analysis of what happens in the moment. (I will return to look specifically at these themes in Chapter 10, *Play in practice*.)

My purpose in making this inquiry is to become more attuned to this dynamic and unfolding dimension of the aesthetic in practice and in so doing to facilitate cooperative inquiries with greater choice and respect.

As importantly, the inquiry is also rooted in the poetic, which I see to be inseparably linked with play.

The poetic

'Poetics' I take to be a wider aesthetic concept than 'poetry', although poetry is one of its most intensely expressive forms. Rather I have come to see 'poetics' as encompassing all those processes of shaping imagination, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols. I argue that inevitably any consideration of the phenomenon of practice draws on the poetic. The main account of this area is found in Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*, although as with play, the poetic is present in many other examples throughout the thesis.

The poetic is not only experienced intrinsically and expressively in practice, but can also be regarded, in itself, as a method of inquiry and as a way of representing this inquiry, (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Marcus, 1994, Denzin, 1997, Barry, 1994, 1996 and 1997, and Linstead, 2000). I shall return to the role of the poetic as a method of inquiry when discussing my own methodology below.

The significance of this poetic focus within this action research finds eloquent confirmation in Rich (2006),

> **'Critical discourse about poetry has said little about the daily conditions of our material existence, past and present: how they imprint the life of feelings, of involuntary human responses – how we glimpse a blur of smoke in the air, look at a pair of shoes in a shop window, or a group of men on a street-corner, how we hear rain on the roof or music on the radio upstairs, how we meet or avoid the eyes of a neighbour or stranger. That pressure bends our angle of vision whether we recognise it or not. ... But when poetry lays its hand on our shoulder we are, to an almost physical degree, touched and moved. The imagination's roads open before us, giving the lie to that brute dictum, "There is no alternative." ' (Rich, 2006, p. 3)**

I now turn to a description of the methodology I used to open up the 'imagination's roads' with a view to discovering shared and better alternatives.

Inquiry methods

Given my developing perception of the centrality of play and poetics within my practice, I needed to find methods which echoed and embodied these qualities. Taylor and Hansen (2005) see the future for research into the aesthetic in organizations as involving a greater use of artistic methods. At various points in this thesis I use writing and pictures in ways which are playful and poetic. Chapter 2, *The inquiring 'I'* is the first significant example where perhaps the Marinetti futurist poem was the most playful. In Chapter 5, *What is my developing aesthetic in practice?* I include a piece of autoethnographic writing which is an exploration of a significant moment in my life during the period of this research. In Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice*, I offer through a fictional narrative, an exploration of the life of a person with moderate learning disabilities, and in so doing 'calibrate' my capacity to understand this through a critical discussion of the text with the day centre manager.

These are the places where I have chosen to work in a more multi-voiced way by switching to play-like and poetic narratives. I have done so because the propositional limits of the thesis narrative would otherwise exclude this aesthetic dimension, just as a written critique of a painting is not substitute for seeing the painting on the wall.

At regular intervals in the main flow of the text my method has been to build up the argument from material taken from my journal, sometimes short fragments, at others fuller accounts of meetings or visits. I also include photos that set off different but complementary resonances. I see the original writing or imaging of these 'capta' to be the beginning of an aesthetic process.

These then form the basis for a structured process which goes through iterative stages of reflexive analysis and sense-making. I now describe this process in greater detail.

Stage 1 Creating the journal

Throughout the period of this research and before that, I have kept a journal, usually but not exclusively about aspects of work practice. More personal writing has also for the last ten years taken the form of poetry or more extended autoethnographic prose writing.

I see journaling as the first catch at what has drawn my attention, a working sketch; what I write needs to be evocative enough for me to recall the sensory and affective impact of the moment. Increasingly what leads me to write are resonances of play and the poetic in encounters. For example, I strive to capture some nuances of dialogue and action, as the

play of a session unfolds. I also find myself drawn to poetic imagery, serendipity and irony in the unexpected turns of what happens. Often too I scribble in those details of names, locations and turning points in conversations when some new insight surfaced, as the loss of these strips the story of its particularity. (I discuss journaling more fully later in this chapter.)

Throughout Silver Street I undertook to do this with even more discipline. I attached great importance to getting these journal texts written swiftly so that they could be available for reading by people in Silver Street. I placed each entry in a file in the staff room the following week, with an invitation for anyone to read and add comments. This writing and publishing of my journal short-circuited several layers of face-to-face social interaction, which would feel right in most dialogic connections.

These entries prompted discussion between staff and myself, usually characterized by their expressing feelings of being affirmed and valued by me, the author. These were not the usual sorts of report that people had written or read. I did not expect that people would follow suit in writing their own accounts, although I would still be delighted to help some do so, if they wished, either here or in future assignments elsewhere.

I did however have evidence in all three Silver Street assignments that people were drawn to this representation of our shared experience. In describing Silver Street-2, I shall show how this sort of record was thought by participants to be 'poetic'; they were keen to read more writing of this type. In Silver Street-3 we reviewed each week's journal together and people were attracted to the way it was written and commented on the breadth of aesthetic narrative which one person described as 'holistic'.

Stage 2 Commenting on the journal

Reading through the journal at regular intervals in the weeks after it was written, I noticed the need for a second level of writing. I left the journal, as written, sometimes warts and all, and developed a commentary, which began to build bridges between the story of Silver Street and the story of my inquiry.

When I was considering how to select and sequence items for inclusion in this thesis, I hit upon the idea of the two-column layout so that I could add a commentary on the particular significance stories had for me, in parallel with the text.

This reflexive voice represented an initial level of inquiry into this material. It was a form of conversation between me as the journal writer and me as the person engaged in first person inquiry into what had drawn my attention.

I also noticed that the discipline of doing this acted as a filter for the editing out of journal material where it failed to generate very much commentary. Given the immediacy of the writing of items, its is perhaps not surprising that some of this material had become anecdotal or circumstantial and ceased to have much significance to me beyond the diarizing of the moment.

Equally it was clear that some episodes provoked me to write longer and deeper commentaries. They became the initial building blocks. In both columns of writing I noticed how much care they took to craft; they claimed extra attention. It was out of these episodes that the focus on play and poetry began to emerge.

One of the qualities that drew me to such episodes was the degree of sensory and affective resonance they set up in me. They evoked my imaginal response, often connecting with other memories and feelings. I became engaged in constructing the written item as an act of inner reflection, often in the process discovering more of the symbolic significance for me which lay behind my original intuition. This I would now see as an expression of the poetic nature of the inquiry.

Another quality which set up resonances was to do with action and narrative. An event turned out in an unexpected way, much as a story or drama takes on an unexpected turn. This too would have its roots in the sensory impact of what happened, but it was the narrative, plot and characters engaging in the play that drew me to produce a representation of it. Such engagements belong more to the play theme of this inquiry.

Stage 3 Making sense of the two columns

In compiling this thesis, I developed a further stage of sense-making analysis below the two-column frame of journal and commentary. This was because with the benefit of reflection I needed to push myself further in addressing claims that were not fully substantiated. At this stage I often found much more depth in an episode. It was as though I had switched off my first commentary too soon and ran the risk of losing pertinent insights. I also noticed that the need to add this further sense-making layer was prompted by reading the literature, as my theoretical base became clearer and more established.

A further filtering of material occurred at this stage of designing and drafting chapters. Some episodes found themselves being moved from one section to another in different revisions, because they were so rich in material that they might have contributed to the development of a number of themes. Others may have attracted interest initially but were no longer earning their keep and were edited out, because their symbolic significance had been reduced or lost in transit.

I also found myself attending to the balance between on the one hand, propositional writing and theoretical reference, and on the other, the analysis of practice material. As the drafting process continued, I rejected any passages on theory, which had become disconnected from practice material. I tried wherever possible to interleave the two. If I could not do this, I found myself questioning why.

This stage was the most rigorous but valuable part of the whole thesis writing process. Through supervision I was repeatedly challenged to substantiate claims and to deepen commentaries, as the thesis began to come together.

Intrinsic and expressive

Early on it became clear to me that the aesthetic in practice had a reflexive and inner dimension and an expressive and outer dimension. I therefore adopted two terms, the *intrinsic* aesthetic and *expressive* aesthetic to describe these. Given their importance to the structuring of the thesis, I now briefly amplify how I am using them.

By an *intrinsic* aesthetic in practice I mean the sensory perceptions of participants and the related improvisatory flow of thoughts and feelings which are experienced and exchanged in practice encounters and relationships. Inquiring into the intrinsic aesthetic involves 'in-the-moment noticing' of this flow and subsequent reflexive inquiry into it. Given this as a research intention, I developed the three stage method, just described, for capturing, analyzing and making sense of this complex phenomenon.

The main inquiry into this sensory and affective arena is given in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.

By an *expressive* dimension of the aesthetic I mean creative activities and artefacts which are consciously introduced into practice; these include games, story-telling, poetry, pictures, music, drama and other expressive forms. I have been concerned to find out what such activities and artefacts add positively to ways of knowing and acting, in the groups with which I work.

This dimension is considered in greater depth in Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice,*

I also note that what I am describing here is a spectrum rather than two discrete categories. There is, for example, a territory in the middle of this spectrum where intrinsic awareness of an aesthetic gives rise to the structured expressive statements in the form of dialogue.

My method in practice

I shall now illustrate the three-stage inquiry process described above, by including a short example.

On a number of occasions my eye has been caught by unexpected incidents or co-incidents, which frequently in journal writing reveal themselves to contain an element of irony.

These moments are transitory and ephemeral. It is as though they are there to work as a way of liberating energy, a protection against what Bateson referred to as 'conscious purposefulness', as if meaning jumps from the moment without being deliberately sought. Sometimes they can be captured photographically in the moment or in spoken or written words later, as in the example overleaf, which describes an incident during a visit I made with staff to meet a MENCAP group in a park. I offer it as a form of 'work-in-progress', as I discovered in incorporating it here that it triggered a further 'Stage 3' process of sense-making.

Journal ... The photo that never was

Journal	Commentary
'One of our group wanders off. He's wearing a protective helmet. He finds a park bench fifty yards away and lies down on it. A carer follows him to sit beside him. I have been taking a few photos on the throwaway camera that I bought at Heathrow before going to do a one-day job in the Czech Republic. I am aware of the strange juxtaposition, on the same strip of film, of my shots of the international bankers meeting in Karlovy Vari, formerly Karlsbad, and this MENCAP group in a municipal park in North London.	I notice how I have included this reference to this one-day trip. I was struck by the complete contrast that I experienced and enjoyed from one day to the next. I might now add that working on this assignment to assist a colleague, was little more than an exceptional jaunt for me, a useful income supplement. The camera film seemed to form a symbolic link between these two disparate worlds.
As I reach the park bench, I notice a remarkable photo waiting to be taken. I clutch for the camera in my pocket. Above the man's recumbent body, is a sign pinned on the backrest of the park bench, 'Warning - Wet paint'. In the second it takes me to think about the propriety of taking a shot, he has got up and moved away. Mercifully this is a 'stale' notice; neither he nor his carer have paint marks on their clothes.'	I am reminded that my inhibition in taking the photo was a concern about the risk of making the service user an object of fun. Whilst I lost the actual shot, I gained this written one, which avoids this trap.

Now as I come back to this episode and my comments, I am struck by the 'avoidance' at work in the commentary column. Why did I think it necessary to explain about the Czech Republic and to whom was this addressed, – perhaps an audience whom, I would like to think, sees me as *Silver Street* and *International Bankers*? Certainly there was a resonance about the juxtaposition of these two assignments and their representation side by side on the undeveloped film. But this was more about my self-image as a consultant, than the man on the bench.

So if I now attend to the man himself and my seeing him, a different commentary is elicited. I can see that there were play resonances in this moment. It is the irony of this short sequence of actions, which engages my imagination. The observation of a potential mishap has something of visual slapstick comedy about it as though an audience should be shouting a warning, 'Behind you!' No sooner is this sensed than the joke bounces back on the head of the observer as the man gets up, unaware of the 'wet paint' and equally unaware of the dry paint he has lain on beneath the 'stale' notice. This adds a level of pathos; such a moment shows how someone who cannot read and is 'in a world of their own' can successfully take little or no account of the purposeful business of the organised world around them. Of course sometimes it would work to their disadvantage, but that would become a different story lacking irony, as vain attempts were made to rub the paint off.

I note too that it is only in revising this chapter that I have seen this clearly the distinction between an inquiry into the way I wrote the original journal item and an inquiry which returns to the nature of my engagement with the man on the bench. This connects again with Shotter's (1993) observation, referenced at the start of this chapter, to how a fascination with metamethodologies in research can take over from the process of developing metatheories.

In making this further cycle of inquiry I also demonstrate the process of the inquiry method in that it starts in the original noticing and carries through journaling or photography, a first round of commentary and then further sense-making through selection and connection with this text.

Writing to learn

I now describe how I have written to learn, both through journaling and autoethnography.

Journaling and autoethnography

The source material of my inquiry is principally my written accounts of practice, with the later addition of photos, – I acquired a digital still camera at the beginning of 2005. Gadamer (1975) reflects on the possibility that all writing, not just fiction or poetry, can be seen as part of the same ontological process,

> **'Meaning and the understanding of it are so closely connected to the corporeality of language that understanding always involves an inner speaking as well.' (Gadamer 1975, p. 153)**

The corporeality of language is expressed in many ways, including through fragments of language that become verbal mantras and refrains, in much the way that musical refrains can do. Meaning, and the understanding of it, plays out as spoken words in talking to yourself or sleep talking, or through the process of sub-vocalization, which occurs, particularly but not solely in children, as they quietly voice what they read.

He continues,

> **'Nothing is so purely the trace of the mind as writing, but nothing is so dependent on the understanding mind either. In deciphering and interpreting it, a miracle takes place: the transformation of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity.' (Ibid., p. 156)**

This reasserts for me the potent influence that writing can have, when compared with other media. The life that Gadamer refers to is in the participative selection and shaping of the words by the writer and the imaginative re-evocation by the reader as they engage with the words on the page.

Journaling is the form of writing I used frequently throughout this inquiry. Journaling has received attention from a number of writers, [Van Maanen, (1988), Hunt and Sampson, (1998), Moon, (2006)]. Boud et al., (1985) see journaling as a powerful means of representing and supporting learning in study programmes. Students are encouraged to

develop a reflexive record of how they are learning. D Winter et al., (1999) describe the use of writing as a way of conducting reflective inquiries into health and social work practice. They offer examples of the use of creative texts which build from practice records.

What I have taken from these accounts, is the value of placing on the page inner perceptions and reflections about inquiry. The act of doing so involves imaginative and reflexive processes; it also requires a discipline and thoughtfulness as the writer engages in their own conversation with the unfolding text. Once written it becomes an artefact which can prompt further cycles of reflection, like a holding statement, which can be re-examined and developed further through commentary or dialogue with others.

In reading about autoethnography in Ellis and Bochner, (2000), Sparkes, (2002) and Gergen, (2003), I discovered that some of the choices which I had intuitively made about recording personal narratives, have already been explored by others. Sparkes, (2002) for example references Mykhalovskiy, (1996) in rejecting the criticism that autobiographical sociology might be a form of narcissism, by pointing out,

> **'... how writing the self involves, at the same time, writing about the 'other' and how the work of the other is also at the same time about the self of the writer.' (Mykhalovskiy, 1996, p. 133)**

Sparkes' (2002) own work focuses on his experience of a serious sports injury that prevented him from fulfilling predictions of achievement in playing rugby at a national level. He represents and inquires into this trauma, by autoethnographic writing, using a multi-layered text; an important purpose in doing this was to understand better the embodied nature of his experience over time and to represent it in ways which others could relate to imaginatively.

He claims that,

> **'when an autoethnography strikes a chord in readers, it may change them and the direction of that change cannot be predicted.' (Sparkes, 2002, p. 221)**

This is a claim that has also been made more generally for aesthetic inquiry and I shall consider its strength and relevance to my own work in Part D.

In my first person practice I have subjected journal items to cycles of analysis and sense-making to get a deeper understanding of my own aesthetic development. I have also used them as a vehicle to create dialogue with others.

Audience

There is never an absence of audience. Sartre (1967) points out that all works of the mind contain within themselves an image of the reader for whom they are intended.

Fisher and Phelps (2006) also observe in a review of the process of thesis writing based on action research, that there is a narrative to the stages of discovery in this sort of inquiry, which needs to be respected,

> **'An action research endeavour is the story of individual and/or group change: change in practices, beliefs and assumptions. Personal narrative, and the notion of research as story repositions the reader as an active and vicarious co-participant in the research (Ellis and Bochner, 2000).' (Fisher and Phelps, 2006, p. 153)**

It is though important to question who the audience is and how my perception of its identity and values is framing and influencing me as I write.

For example, I noticed how in my accounts I sometimes walk around the edge of issues such as ethnicity or sexuality. For me my perception that a staff member is Afro-Caribbean, in her fifties and motherly, is an important part of my recall of the moment. However, I notice on the other hand that I have not chosen to mention that Fiona is white; neither have I mentioned that I assume that one of her colleagues is gay. I acknowledge that I am inevitably writing to a self-constructed audience which is white and liberal, my internalised audience, and certainly an audience which would hate to be seen as discriminatory in what it found different or worthy of comment.

If I were working in video, audio or still photos, this specific level of representation would be there to see and hear, although still subject to selective emphasis. (In a moment I will describe my experience in making visual records as I introduced photography into my methods of inquiry.) Words impose a responsibility to strive for writerly authenticity as well as show respect for others; it is my choice to *make* someone white, black, straight or gay through my words, if I need you to see that.

As importantly too I show how I am imaginatively relating to this whiteness or blackness, this straight or gayness in the way I represent my experience. Being more acutely and regularly aware of these framings, my behaviour may change in one direction or another.

I contribute some different energy to others in the act of doing so.

In methodological terms this has meant regarding journal material as a first base in sense-making, a secure but temporary place from which to venture further. I have therefore left the text as written because even where on later reading it seems not to be saying what I now want to say, that is in itself a matter of interest. The news of difference between the journal, its commentary and its subsequent integration into a thesis argument offers, at each stage, a chance to reflect more deeply on issues such as the one just described. The metaphor of triangulation comes to mind, as material is seen and compared from at least three different perspectives.

In deciding to make my journal available it acquired a fourth perspective. My imaginatively projected audience was mirrored by an actual reading audience within the Silver Street community and this comparison gave me a further way of validating my reflective process. An example of this will be found in Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*, in the commentary that follows the fictional story I wrote based on the life of Tony. I describe there how showing the story to the Centre Manager prompted a discussion, and a revision of the story, which would not have been otherwise possible.

The outcome here was not just a question of writing a better story although I think that did happen. Rather what I noticed in this dialogue with the manager was the extent to which my framing of the experience of people with learning disabilities still embodied areas of unexplored difference. I learned from this more about the silent implicative double that surrounded our participation.

One part of the evidence was in my noticing how I had projected my own reflective behaviours onto others. In this sense I was not aware until this moment where my identity, values and assumptions were blinding me to a closer participation in the experience of another. As an inquiry method this process, a form of recalibration, was as important as the resulting story. I see it as part of the development of my own critical subjectivity, (Heron and Reason, 1997). I was able through the writing and the discussion to locate more critically in what senses the subjectivity that I brought to the writing had influenced my understanding of

the experience of learning disability, and in a further loop, my engagement more generally with second person inquiry.

To conclude my thoughts on textual representation the following points are highlighted:

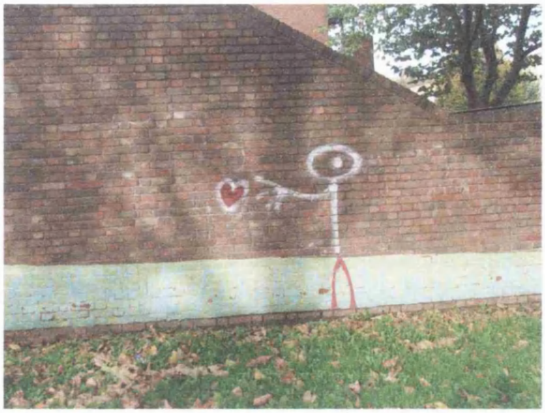
- My journal writing and the iterative reflection in writing commentaries have grown as a part of my Action Research methodology. They made it possible for me to understand better some of the otherwise intangible processes of play and poetry that are embedded in what I describe.

- Writing soon after the event captures sensuous detail and the immediacy of what was said and done, as well as, by implication, what was not said or done; reflective commentaries on the journals at some interval provides a meta-layer to the writing.

- The crafting of the words is heavily influenced by internalized readerships. The iterative cycle of reflection and commentary increased my insights into the way these imaginative participations affected the writing.

- Through returning the text to the arena from which it springs it becomes an artefact that promotes second person inquiry, by challenging recollection and stimulating further dialogue.

Visual representation



I now turn my attention to my new-found inquiry method of photography and what I am discovering about it as form of visual ethnography.

Pink (2001) surveys the recent history of using photos and video as visual ethnography. She points out that from the '60s to the early '80s, there was considerable debate about the use of these media in anthropology. Some writers dismissed pictures as being too subjective; others tried to impose some objective routines on the way photos and video were taken and used, in order to conform to the criteria of textual positivist social science. Alternatively pictures were used as the illustrative material for the main text.

The turning point came when Clifford (1986) observed that ethnographies are in any case constructed narratives. Ethnographic truths are, Clifford claimed, '... **inherently partial, committed and incomplete',** (Clifford, 1986, p. 7) In the '90s, Pink points out, a paradigmatic change occurred which encouraged ethnographers to cease to try to fit pictures into scientific-realist approaches. MacDougall (1997) proposed rather that it was necessary to contemplate,

> **'a shift from word-and-sentence-based anthropological thought to image-and-sequence-based anthropological thought'. (MacDougall, 1997, p. 292)**

Pink argues that it was the visual anthropologist, Chaplin (1994), who identifies a way ahead. She proposed that rather than regard the visual as 'data' which needs to be analysed verbally, it should be seen as a medium in its own right for the creation of new knowledge. This would be achieved by reducing the distance between the discipline and its subject of study. Pink distinguishes between theoretical approaches to the use of the visual in

anthropology, ethnography and cultural studies. As Pink describes this transition, I notice a similarity between these transitions and those that occurred in the development of action research, which also sees the researcher as a participant within the field of inquiry.

However beneath these related but different developments, she argues, there are broader theoretical trends. McQuire (1998) for example sees the promiscuity and ambiguity of the image as offering simultaneous appearances of the subjective and the objective. Here there seems to be a clear link with Heron and Reason's (1997) concept of the subjective/objective approach of action research. There are also links with Merleau-Ponty (1945) in that both make a case for attending to 'the thing itself' rather than a verbal analogue of the thing.

Barthes (1980) in his remarkable final work *Camera Lucida* asks what the photo is **'in itself'** and questions whether photography exists, **'with a genius of its own'**. (Barthes, 1980, p. 3) He remarks on the phenomenon of replicability, **'what the photo reproduces to infinity has occurred once only'**. (Ibid., p. 4) He then claims that it is impossible to distinguish a specific photo from its referent, from what it represents. In viewing a range of photos that he loves, he rejects any social or cultural narrative which might explain them, **'looking at certain photographs I wanted to be a primitive, without culture.'**, (Ibid., p. 7).

I show overleaf a small selection of pictures to open up my account of the way photography is working for me in both first and second forms of inquiry. I shall include further material of this sort as I describe the development of the Silver Street work in subsequent Parts.

© Artscope

Eating features in a number of the photos I have collected at Silver Street. This one by Keith who runs the Centre's arts project was taken in a lunch break during my third assignment. George, the person shown, travels by himself from his hostel and has a part-time job working in a garden centre.

A number of people using the Service have more severe physical and learning disabilities and need support to eat and move. Eating is a communal activity, the food being prepared on a family basis by staff in small kitchens in each unit.

As I look at these photos I find myself seeing pictures within pictures. By cropping the picture above I have emphasised the reaching arm so that its focus becomes the strong limb connecting two mouths, one willing the other to accept food.

Although I am aware of the specificity and immediacy of the photos, I also notice that they communicate in ways which carry many other complex messages about the people and the setting. For me as a participant they also provide another first person lens, both literally and metaphorically, through which to reflect on the action and my relationship with it. For example, why is there a sombrero in the background? This prompts me to think about the number of latent resources which come and go in this environment, some actively used, some left on one side to be discarded, as in a home. Even if discarded, they represent efforts to introduce stimulating artefacts and activities into this space.

What does the overlaying of hands in the shot below say about the relationship between worker and service user?

The picture is ambiguous; it could be that the whiter hands belong to a staff member taking a photo with some playful help from a service user. It could be that the hint of nail varnish belongs to the hands of a man. The picture prompts an evocative physical reconstruction of childlike warmth, of flesh on flesh. The picture elicits reactions, permitting a range of imaginative interpretations. This demonstrates in a specific way the complex relationship between the conscious and receptive 'I' and images such as this. It is a relationship full of creative ambiguity and negativity, (Linstead, 2000). (I shall discuss further this concept of negativity in Chapter 11, *The poetics in practice*.) Ambiguity can of course also lead to confusion or prejudice. However through critical awareness and reflexivity in working with visual and textual materials I hope to become more open to multiple aesthetic meanings in practice.

It is in working with this ambiguity that my sense of inquiry deepens. Pictures can also stimulate iterative cycles of questioning. So as I look again now at the photo, it is the meaning of the folding of one hand over the other that speaks more strongly to me than

other cultural or social meanings. Why is the little finger folded back? What did each person feel? Was the guiding contact of the hands absorbed into the sense of seeing what the camera might point to, and therefore largely unnoticed other than as part of this action? I think here of Merleau-Ponty's (1945) account of hands sewing cloth as embodied knowing in action. (This is discussed further in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.)

Digital photography offers a tool for reflection and representation within action research. I have been struck by the differences between representations of the moment through a photo, or through text. I shall later explore these differences in a detailed commentary on my photo of a woman and her care worker at Silver Street, (see Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.) A further methodological dimension of the visual is shown in Chapter 13, *The news of difference in Silver Street-3*, when photos, video and graphic images taken by people with learning disabilities formed an essential way of advancing our action research inquiry.

Conclusion

The world that invites inquiry is not orderly or predictable. The unexpected synchronicity of virtually any mix of actions, words or images can gain new meaning in the moment. The occurrence of this serendipity offers further confirmation of a worldview where simple iterations and participations result in complex self-organising patterns, (Capra, 1997).

In this chapter I have described inquiry methods which strive to attune themselves to this complexity. They also needed to help identify what was significant and valid in my understanding better the aesthetic in my practice and how it influences my way of working with others.

I started the chapter by defining the nature of this inquiry as one that is rooted in a greater awareness of play and the poetic in practice. I referred to play theory and in particular the

four play dispositions identified by Caillois, (1958). The poetic was seen as a wider concept than poetry, encompassing processes of shaping imagination, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols. I forecast a more detailed exploration of both poetics and play in their relevant chapters in Part C.

I explained the distinction that I will be making, between *intrinsic* and *expressive* aesthetics. The intrinsic is there embedded in all encounters whereas the expressive, in the form of activities and artefacts, is introduced as part of the design of events.

The main section of the chapter was devoted to an account of my inquiry methods.

These were described as consisting of three stages. Stage 1 was the initial capture of material through journal writing and more recently through photography. This stage is the methodological baseline for iterative cycles of reflection and sense-making.

Stage 2 was described as the addition of commentary in a two-column layout.

In Stage 3 I select items for incorporation into the narrative of this thesis. At this stage further sense-making commentary is needed to connect with the context and direction of my argument.

Through these methods of iterative commentary and dialogic inquiry with others, I became aware that there were penumbra of tacit knowledge (Polyani, 1958), in the writing. I noticed the silent implicative double referred to by Linstead, (2000); allusions and imagery hint at these lacunae. In Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*, I will consider this further and show how poetic forms of inquiry attune more readily to an understanding of what lies beyond the edge of propositional definition.

I illustrated these methods in use by a short example, entitled 'The photo that never was'. This moment was drawn from the second Silver Street project. The news of difference in this partially enclosed world was evident everywhere, in adults who need feeding and changing, in their apparently random moving about, repetitive fixations on objects and in words and gestures which sometimes appear to come from nowhere. These encounters threw into sharp contrast the aesthetic knowing of my other day-to-day experiences which, through familiarity, become assumed and therefore partly or wholly hidden.

Under the title, *Writing to learn*, I described the place of textual representation in my inquiry through journaling and authoethnography.

I recorded some of my reflections on the challenges and potentialities of writing as an inquiry method. Referencing Gadamer I described how the corporeality of language is such that **'understanding always involves an inner speaking'**. Audience is always embedded in the texture of what is written. I considered how a sense of audience influenced what I write and how I write it.

Visual ethnography, which in my case is currently limited to the medium of photography, was discussed with reference to Pink (2001); it is seen as offering a complementary channel of inquiry with its own poetic potentialities. I included a short commentary on some photos depicting scenes from Silver Street, as a sample of the method I shall use later in the thesis.

This chapter completes *Part A, FRAMING THIS THESIS.* There follows a short working sketch and an interlude which leads into *Part B, THE AESTHETIC IN PRACTICE.*

Working sketch – Day trips, 29/08/06

'Progress' is always governed in my story by such factors as the synchronicity between my discovery of personally relevant theory and different opportunities for practice. The notion of progress implies a journey, in my case the one I referred to in the opening lines of this thesis.

As Fisher and Phelps (2006) comment,

'... attempting to maintain coherence within a particular chosen metaphor may lead to being too identified with the metaphor itself and prevent disconfirming 'truths' being voiced.' Fisher and Phelps (2006, p.106)

So my 'journey' will probably be seen as a series of more and more purposeful daytrips with several more extended excursions, followed by staying at home to reflect on practice and relate it to relevant literature.

At this stage of revision of the thesis I am also aware of the courage needed to face up to 'disconfirming truths'. I feel most connected with my inquiry when I am excising the travel brochures that have crept in, as I try to confront more openly where I can now see the journey taking me.

Interlude – Part A to Part B

The intention of Part A was to provide an account of the direction and purpose of this inquiry. I also set out the main ontological, epistemological and methodological framework in which I shall be working.

Now in Part B I advance my inquiry into the two key questions around which the thesis is built,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way influence others?

My first response to these questions is to describe how my alertness to the aesthetic in practice has developed. This has been through an action research process of noticing and reflecting on those experiences that prompt curiosity, or offer some other challenge or delight. I describe and analyse encounters where I am aware of this deepening sense of the aesthetic in my own reflexive practice.

I then move on to consider in what ways this influences my working or being with others. The main vehicle for this is the representation and analysis of the first of the three Silver Street projects, during which I became a volunteer going through a period of induction and orientation. In so doing, I became keenly aware of the different aesthetic of this new community. I also negotiated with staff the dual relationship I was seeking with them, as volunteer and researcher.

The channel for communicating and sharing my personal sense of the aesthetic of these early experiences was through face-to-face dialogue and my written journals, which I made available to staff at the Centre.

The other task of Part B is to illustrate the relationship between the intrinsic aesthetic and the expressive aesthetic of practice. The intrinsic aesthetic, is described as the flow of sensory perceptions, feelings and ideas that is pervasive in our experience; the expressive aesthetic of practice occurs where through conscious choice, inquiry groups use aesthetic processes and artefacts to open up different ways of understanding and mean-making.

Here is a brief guide to the four chapters in Part B.

Chapter 5, What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
The discussion is organised around the intrinsic/expressive spectrum as I review and analyse journal material. Merleau-Ponty provides me with an introductory framing to the chapter as I consider what it means to 'return to the things themselves'. I illustrate through an analysis of three short journal episodes my attraction to moments that make an aesthetic impact on me.

Then I move on to consider how the representation of my intrinsic aesthetic experience transforms it. I explore this through the inclusion of a sustained piece of expressive writing, which I analyse, from an autoethnographic perspective.

Chapter 6, How does working in this way influence others?
The main material in this chapter is drawn from Silver Street-1 and includes accounts of my initial meeting with staff, a day working as a volunteer in two of the Centre's units, and a concluding staff meeting where a dialogue developed about people's purpose in working there.

In analysing these journals I consider how the aesthetic focus of my own first person inquiry influences those with whom I work during this initial stage at Silver Street.

Chapter 7, The intrinsic aesthetic in practice
Here I consider what the concept of the *intrinsic* aesthetic in practice means to me. I explore how sense-making through writing and photos deepens my awareness of the *intrinsic* aesthetic and show how this deeper awareness influences my working with others. The discussion is organized around journal items relating to place, artefacts and relationships.

Chapter 8, The expressive aesthetic in practice
In this final chapter to Part B I draw on my experience of facilitating expressive activities within action inquiries. This discussion is organized around three types of process, – the embodied and kinaesthetic, the evocative and the constructive.

A note on the thematic developments in Part B and beyond
The story of the three Silver Street projects provides a sense of timescale and change during the period covered by this research. Growing out of this story are the thematic topics of the thesis – the aesthetic, both intrinsic and expressive, – play and the poetic, and – action research as the informing participative approach that I adopted. These run like a matrix across and through the story.

As these three pieces of work progressed at Silver Street, the accounts of each stage will show a developing experience of second person inquiry as issues that concerned this community are addressed. It is, however, my continuing first person inquiry into the aesthetic in practice that provides the main thesis focus, although this would have been impossible without the parallel engagement in second person inquiry. The initial attraction to the implicit aesthetic that engaged me in the place and the people of Silver Street, is also progressively supplemented by experience of a more expressive aesthetic through the use of creative media.

Part B

THE AESTHETIC IN PRACTICE

5 What is my developing aesthetic in practice?

5 What is my developing aesthetic in practice?

Introduction

The title of this chapter contains the first of the two inquiry questions, which I identified at the start of this thesis. In addressing it, I shall explore in greater detail what I mean by my own aesthetic and how I represent it in my developing practice. I will structure my response by using the concept of intrinsic and expressive aesthetics that I introduced in the previous chapter.

The chapter will therefore concern itself with inquiring into,

- the intrinsic aesthetic that I notice and reflect on, and
- its expressive presentation within a developing practice.

The material I have selected falls into the category of first person inquiry and is drawn, with one exception, from practice that was running alongside the Silver Street projects. In discussing it I shall use the three-stage method of analysis and sense-making described in the previous chapter.

Chapter 2, *The inquiring 'I'*, also illustrated how I use the expressive media of writing and photos to represent aspects of my life and experience as a context for this inquiry. The items included there and the commentary I added to them provide an indication of the way I experience the intrinsic aesthetic and how it leads to the creation of expressive statements and pictures. Here the balance between expressive material and commentary shifts in favour of commentary as I inquire into the sense in which the aesthetic energises and contributes to my practice.

In the first half I work on journal extracts containing brief first person inquiries, which focus on moments of intrinsic aesthetic experience. My commentary on these is influenced by Merleau-Ponty's invitation to 'return to the things themselves'.

In the second half of the chapter I consider how the act of representation extends and changes experience as it is transformed into an artefact. In this case the expressive statement is a more extended piece of writing made about a significant moment in my life. I conclude by considering how this works as an autoethnographic piece of research.

'Return to things themselves ...'

I have come to understand the noticing of the intrinsic aesthetic as a form of invitation to participate, at a stage before experience is processed through reflection. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us,

> **'To return to things themselves is to return to that world which precedes knowledge, ...**
> **(Merleau-Ponty, 1945, translated in1962, p. ix-x.)**

Aesthetic connections with the things themselves are both pervasive and illusive. Representations of them, through stories, images and actions, flow equally in participative profusion. Through a developing sense of the aesthetic in practice I became interested in selecting from this profusion, those often illusive connections that work in poetic or playful ways. These moments attract me because they connect with and alter my patterns of sense-making; they find a creative link with previous thoughts and feelings. In capturing them in some form of artefact they are changed; through representation they become images and narratives, which are independent of me, whilst still having creative connection with me, and with others who may evocatively re-imagine them.

I now illustrate these processes from my journals. I have found excerpts which have immediacy about them; they seem particularly close to the thing which brought them to life. This sense of closeness may be because there was some poetic charge that made them significant to me at the time. Sometimes too the thing had a playful dramatic energy; it surprised me by what it offered. Here are some examples.

Landscape

Journal items are frequently triggered for me by a participative experience of nature. Overleaf is one such excerpt.

journal ... Hawkswood, Friday 18/02/04

Journal

I'm at Hawkswood near Stroud and up early in this delightfully faded mansion, a former home for some wealthy Edwardian family, now morphed into an adult residential learning centre.

The grounds roll down to an extended view of Stroud and the countryside beyond. Soft but persistent rain still falls, having started some time during the night. Jays argue harshly in a giant sycamore framed in the open window. Mild air flows through the room, washing the night away.

I have removed the mirrors from the secondhand dressing table because they are blocking my view as I write, and also because they look as though the offending item was manufactured in Lithuania long before its 'liberation' from Soviet domination.

Commentary

At first I am trying to capture the ephemeral sensory impact of this moment, the flow of moist air from the landscape into the room. Then the last paragraph moves to action based on an aesthetic reaction to the furniture.

My participation in the moment is turned into narrative through the account of the removal of the mirrors; this says something about the value to me of the view. I do not want it obscured; I am seeking to construct the moment by clearing my visual access to it.

The action comes from a playful persona. The narrative link with Lithuania, where I made four consultancy visits in the '90s, starts to create a dramatic storyline. My physical experience of the second-hand furniture in Stroud connected aesthetically with similar sensations pulling open cheap drawers by a hotel window in Vilnius.

Mainly though what I hear on re-reading the piece was the self-dramatization of my act and its translation to an exotic and mysterious environment, which is far removed from the Gloucestershire rain, the jay and the sycamore. I am enacting for the reader a fragment of the play of this moment and accepting that it will be evocatively re-storied, as they draw on their own experience. For some readers the link with Lithuania may seem contrived and they will then make a judgement about this storytelling persona. For others it may evoke adventure; it may amuse. Its validity for me is that the sounds and weight of holding the

sections of furniture connected these two contexts in the moment of action, although they were twelve years and many miles apart.

Urbanscape

Urban tackiness surfaces in many of my notes, as in this account of an interval in an interviewing day for a community project.

journal ... Terminal solitude, January 2003

Journal	Commentary
I walk up towards the canal; I'm on my own for the afternoon and evening to make a series of visits to Board members who will attend the day next Saturday. It is extremely cold and a traffic argument has developed in Gilmore Road, drivers hooting with continental rage at a West Indian looking older man who has parked his car obstructively while he loads up the boot. Around the corner a hearse goes by with a coffin and a rather surreal procession of three limousines following, with no one other than the drivers in them. For a moment I wonder if the provisions of some sad will are being played out to the letter – 'let no one come to my funeral but provide three cars'. This image of terminal solitude hangs powerfully over me despite my visualising the actual crowd of waiting mourners somewhere in the borough. Who will be the mourners of this community programme as it processes out of sight; what will be left to show? Past the Leighton Tower block that looks forebodingly Eastern European and on along the canal by Meanwhile Community Gardens where a couple of men are digging the frozen earth in a dilatory way and then to the Community Centre to see Mr Savindra, my first interviewee.'	Travelling through, and spending time in a new environment heightens my receptivity to the aesthetic in my practice. I have already referred to this as a factor in my connection with Silver Street. I notice how Eastern Europe features a lot in my sense of strangeness and adventure. (I have worked in a number of former Soviet bloc countries.) The multi-ethnic population of this borough is also lightly sketched in.

Here though in this extract it is also the aesthetic of play that energises my perception. The play is in the observation of the funeral procession smoothing past silently. The Alea, or

serendipity of the moment, is what triggers the writing, as I also try to hold together my anxieties about the transitory nature of the group I will be working with the following Saturday.

Choices are constantly made about what constitutes the figure and what the ground. These represented moments may be referred to as 'quotidian'. They are so much a part of experience that to focus on them requires some act of re-positioning or certainly a re-focusing, a close-up view, where time appears briefly to be halted, while the tape runs on in the background.

Parkland

Such participative experiences may come from rural or urban landscapes, the starting points in the examples above.

In the following passage from my first few days of Silver Street I describe a sequence of events, which may have spanned twenty minutes. In noticing and bringing them together, I explore how my developing alertness to the intrinsic aesthetic of this new world was beginning to unfold.

journal ... A summer's afternoon

Journal

We spend a lovely gentle summery afternoon in a park by a river. The process of getting there was geared to how long it takes to lift wheelchairs and occupants by hydraulic ramp onto a small bus provided for the occasion.

Towards the end of the walk we line the chairs up on a jetty by a cafe, overlooking the river. One of our group sits in his wheelchair, his well-padded

protective hat, lolling as he dozes. A young mother has also wheeled her baby down to the riverbank to

Commentary

The connection between conception, birth, ability and disability can be left to work in the reader's mind.

I notice how filmic the moment was, how ironic the connection of the visual images.

take the air. I wonder what is revived in her mind of those unavoidable pre-natal parents' anxieties about disability, as she bounces her well-formed infant on her knee. The random injustice of disability comes powerfully home to me as I gaze on the baby's perfect face.

....

We edge our way up the pavement back to the parked minibus. As one wheelchair is ramped up on to the vehicle, Ian spots a used condom that has snagged itself on a lever by the wheels of the chair. Steve quickly finds a tissue and disposes of what I believe TS Eliot had in mind when he referred in the Waste Land to 'other testimony of summer nights'. For a moment though I see the condom and the young man framed in the same view as the wheel chair rises. If this were a film, the discordant image could be left to resonate in people's eyes. I can find no easy words to unravel the conjunction of innocence and worldliness captured in this fleeting frame.

I resist at the end of this extract the spelling out this connection.

Rather I let the words provide imaginative space for the reader to move forward, backward and across the sequence.

I can still feel some of the ironic force with which these observations struck me.

If I reflect now on this brief moment, I find myself running it through my mind like a film. Dwelling with each part of it reveals to me some of the reasons why I knew it to be poetically significant.

Drawing its imagery together, I notice that,

- the protective helmets spoke of adult vulnerability and helplessness in contrast to the soft, helpless but burgeoning vulnerability of the newborn baby

- the used condom carried very embodied images of sexual intercourse, of physical hunger and its satisfaction

- there is also a cross-current between the last image of the condom and the opening image of the perfect baby.

My only literary device in writing is to suggest to the reader that the final moment might be seen as a shot in a moving film. The craning up of the reader's viewpoint, as if become a camera, moving in sync with the rising chair, is a device to focus on the juxtapositioning of the condom and the young man. It also happens that this is how I constructed it to myself as it came into my view. For one second the two images, the young man's face and then the condom, coincided in my angle of vision, as I looked up at the back of the minibus.

Representing aesthetic knowing

My focus now switches from the intrinsic aesthetic that I experience and notice, to the expressive representation of these experiences. Clearly I cannot share any reflection on my experience without some form of representation. The shift of focus here though is from comparatively brief fragments from my 'baseline' journal to a more expressive and sustained attempt to write the story of a compelling moment in my life. The moments described above were, as with so many that I record, 'objet trouvés' which I have then tried to represent in the frozen smoke of my journal texts. Being alert to their appearance is one important part of my inquiry; representing them in writing is another.

The remainder of this chapter contains a piece of my autoethnographic writing, which was produced as an expressive inquiry into my feelings and thoughts at crucial moment in my life. A number of theorists have defended this type of writing as a valid form of social inquiry, (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, Tilmann-Healey, 1996, Gergen, 2003, Sparkes, 2000 and 2003).

Sparkes (2003) points to what he sees as the inevitability of the writer's self-narrative making a wider connection,

> **'This is because culture circulates through all of us, the self is a social phenomenon, all identity is relational, and my subjective experience is part of the world I (we) inhabit. (Sparkes, 2003, p. 158)**

I have chosen to include this story because it provides an example of a way of conducting this research into the aesthetic by using an aesthetic methodology. Its narrative concerns a matter of considerable personal significance to me, a source of recurrent inquiry. It performs a sense-making function for me in ways which other narratives would have reduced.

I will make further links and connections with the theme of a developing aesthetic in my practice, when I have told the story.

journal ... Close to my heart – Tuesday 20 May 2003

Tuesday 20 May, the Lindo Wing of St Mary's Hospital, Paddington, and I'm about to have the sixth piece of wire in the last eight years passed through my groin and manoeuvred delicately into my heart. I had the angiogram, an initial x-ray-cum-intervention, about two months ago in a high tech lorry trailer at St Albans Hospital. Now the angioplasty will be a repeat process, but will target the 80% closure of my LAD proximal artery which I saw show up on the monochrome monitor during the first investigation. (I have already had two sets of angio-grams and -plasties over a period from 1995 when I had a heart attack.)

The angioplasty process will consist of an inflation of a balloon on the end of an arterial catheter. It will expand a metal mesh 'stent' into the fatty atheroma which is partially obstructing this artery. The stent then stays put, holding the walls of the artery open and the catheter is removed.

I reflect on why I should be sitting here writing this; who is it for? The first two paragraphs above are probably for a readership of family or friends, the world at large that doesn't know what 'angioplasty' means. But I know that the most intimate purpose in writing is to hold back my fear and uncertainty, to understand more about myself at 1pm today. (The procedure is due to happen at 3pm.)

I've read the British Heart Foundation booklet on Angioplasty and the notes provided by the hospital. I notice how my eyes have been drawn to the statistics on success rates and the prognosis. Both, by the way, are encouraging. This is now a fairly commonplace treatment. But I project some of my anxiety onto the named consultant cardiothoracic surgeon whom my consultant cardiologist has arranged 'to provide standard surgical cover because of a small risk of having to undergo emergency coronary artery by-pass surgery'. In my mind I run through a rehearsal of how this might be – a rather frantic winding up of tempo and activity. I imagine how I might enter the catheter lab as a standard angioplasty and exit many hours later from a neighbouring operating theatre having had a full bypass operation. It would be a bit like going to a party and finding you'd stepped through a door into a bugle blowing, flag-waving state occasion. It hasn't happened on the last two occasions, so why now? (But if I don't get back to this piece of writing for several days, it has.)

So what do I think about my heart today? Shame it needs this routine maintenance every three to five years. There's probably a genetic explanation for the arteriosclerosis; my father had a heart attack, which he survived. Until this latest cycle of treatment, I had been pretty satisfied with my heart, as it beat up to 100,000 times a day, after its prima donna performance in a blue light flashing ambulance in 1995. I still feel deeply optimistic about it. I imagine a convergence between its changing health and the development of more and more amazing surgical interventions and treatments. If it continues to need some housekeeping, medicine will have invented even better ways of doing it. I'm also looking forward to the extra energy and performance that a heart with a fuller blood supply should give me.

There's a smell of lunch around the corridors, but I must fast – in case I need an operation. So far I've had a Venflon device inserted in a vein in my arm, to take a blood sample, but also to provide access for any other injections I may need during the procedure. I've also had an ECG, the results of which prompted the kindly but punctilious technician to say, 'Good'. 'In what sense?' I ask. 'Oh just good – it's OK, not in a diagnostic sense. I mean it's worked.' I had watched her earlier coming into and out of the waiting room, as she dealt with great care with an elderly nun and her two nun companions. 'Please sit here, Sister; I'll be with you very soon.' The attendant sisters browse through the waiting room copy of 'Hello' magazine, flicking the pages in a disinterested way.

My consultant, Dr Hackett, has just breezed into the room, calm, residual Irish accent and very reassuring. 'Here we are again.' He did my last two angioplasties. He's a man with a full workload, but he spends enough time to set the scene and answer my questions. He makes the process seem OK, almost like a team effort between us. Apparently the final decision about putting in the stent, rather than just inflating the balloon, will be made by him during the procedure; the artery may not be straight or wide enough to insert the tiny metal mesh tube.

'Yes you were right not to be driving to Bath on Friday. Do nothing like that for a week to ten days.' He spells out the 'angioplasty odds' in percentage terms, then, my having given my consent to his doing the procedure and signed the form, he goes off to do four others before me. I realise I don't have a monopoly on this business. My turn will come around 4 pm.

In my reportage I'm getting drawn into the mechanics of it all. Perhaps that's a good place to be. In the meantime I can see a steady flow of hospital staff and the occasional wheelchair-bound patient cross to and fro in a glazed bridge between this building, the Lindo Wing, and a large new block opposite. I hear the claxon of a train entering nearby Paddington Station and the impatient wail of an ambulance trying to get through traffic to the hospital. Part of me thinks I should be moving into a benign, prepared state, where I cull beautiful thoughts or deep insights in this strange no-man's land of a hospital room. But no, I'm just focussed on the *it*, getting *it* done, satisfactorily finished and getting out of here.

I'm breaking off to take a 300 milligram aspirin and four tablets which reduce the chance of platelets clogging onto the stent. A pneumatic drill has started up again somewhere on the hospital site, lunch break over. I pull down the double glazed window to shut out its distraction. I dip in and out of Thomas Berry's The Great Work, which has just arrived yesterday from Amazon. Suddenly I'm being called to sit in a wheelchair. I'm off.

Wednesday 21st May – a new day, a new room, no emergency by-pass surgery, self-evidently no death, no stroke! Instead two very well placed stents, in the proximal LAD and one in what I think is described as the middle LAD, lower down. (LAD, I think, means the third of three major

arteries*. I have had angioplasties in the other two; this one goes down the front of the heart on the right as you, or anyone else, might look at it.)

I'll now turn back the clock to 4 pm yesterday.

I am aware of a peculiar 'hop' between two modes of experience. In one I begin to become part of a medical system, albeit a complete novice, a reporter borrowing a new and exclusive medical language. In the other I want to make you look at my heart, this centre of me. In this boundary between the inner private and the outer medical lies the ambiguity of being a patient. You enter this public world and don the Wincyette operating gown. You then have the most novel and intimate encounter with your heart. There it is on the screen, like a veined lively piece of meat, but strangely contained by, and totally dependent on this expert science and the dexterity of the surgeon's hands, which are now gently pressing and pushing on my groin.

I recall seeing a TV documentary about 'spiritual' operations where a shaman or witchdoctor worked on a seriously ill patient and claimed to be delving bare-handed into their abdomen to destroy and remove a tumour. The witchdoctor's hands flickered and tugged above the skin, doing who knows what good or ill for the trusting patient.
I am having my procedure now at 4 pm and this shamanic movement of hands comes to mind again. I am lying on a motorised X-ray table below an equally agile motorised arm which carries the X-ray camera. At times the two systems dance together at the surgeon's whim. My body is the inert layer between the upper firmament of the x-ray eye and the terra infirma of the bed. The bed moves backwards and forward, left and right as the camera knowingly ducks and dives to get a better view.

The cast for this mini-drama are mainly female and mainly antipodean, a fact brought to my attention by the New Zealand senior technician as she slops cold sterilising fluid on my shaven groins. Dr Hackett arrives. There is a convivial mood which almost deflates my sense of occasion. 'Hey,' I feel like saying, 'It's OK gagging about whether it takes a man, rather than a woman, to open a tight jar, but this is my heart you're dealing with, my big day.' Needless to say the procedure is well prepared and will be well executed.

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* *Left anterior descending coronary artery*, I later discover.

Dr Hackett gets off to a brisk start. 'You'll feel a needle prick. First I'm anaesthetising the skin, then I'm deeper round the artery! 'OK, that's it; if it hurts now, you should yell, scream and shout – but I'd be very surprised if it does?'

It doesn't. I realize I'm holding my back and legs locked against what is going to happen, so I consciously try to relax.

'The catheter's already in,' says Dr Hackett. I know it is, because my heart now has a slight sensation, a cross between a flush and an instability deep inside my chest. I'm always amazed that this stage is reached so quickly. Enormous skill and training are required to direct the curved end of it down into each artery, without damaging them.

Now I have a sense of fluttering, working hands – shamanic hands – although these are connected to my heart by wire. The shamanic eyes are connected via the X-Ray system. They both come together in my coronary arteries, to make subtle life-giving manoeuvres.

More gentle pulling and manipulation and Dr Hackett reports that he can see the first and the second angioplasty sites he had worked on since 1995; they are both fine. So now for the new one. Some intense exchanges follow, between him and the radiographer. From one angle the blockage seems less than expected. So more angles are viewed. He discovers the blockage is not concentric; this explains the first sighting. It does need doing; I am not lying here as a confidence trick.

'It's important to place the stent in the best place: you only get one go at it, unlike using just the balloon without a stent'.

He's happy he's got it correctly in place. There's a compressor noise from near the bed. The metal mesh of the stent is being expanded by the balloon. I'd been warned this might hurt for 30 seconds to a minute.

It does. It feels exactly like the beginning of a heart attack. The stent in place, the balloon is relaxed, leaving the fine mesh of the stent expanded holding the atheroma back against the artery wall. The pain persists for a minute or two. 'It's OK; your ECG is fine.' For the first time I feel less in control; the ache is deep in my chest. I try to take a closer interest in the monitor and what Dr Hackett is doing, by way of distraction. The pain begins to melt away.

He's found another stenosis in the same artery and is considering if this should be stented too. 'Yes please, do it,' I say, surprising myself by my vehemence. I realise he will decide what's best, without my encouragement. Another nine millimeter stent goes in, is placed and inflated. The pain grows for a moment then wanes. I'm offered a painkiller injection through the arm, but know it is not necessary. '50% of patients have some pain afterwards, but we'll give you a painkiller if you need it.' The hole in my groin is plugged with a new collagen device which will slowly dissolve over three months. This will also reduce the time I need to lie flat on my back today.

I can tell that he's pleased with the accuracy of the job; he compares the before and after still frames on the monitor. 'Yes, if I were doing it again, I would do it no differently". He goes, leaving the team to slide me on to a trolley. I'm still slightly high from the intensity of the experience. I thank those staff I can see from my prone position. I feel hot-faced and still aching in my chest, but I just know that it has been well done. As I'm wheeled to the lift, I suddenly beginning to feel tired, but greatly relieved. I watched the confusion of pipes and cables in the ceiling passing above me! I have this strange illusion that up is down and that I am really floating along looking down on the ceiling tiles, like some disorderly swimming pool floor.

The remainder of the day passes in a drifting grateful way; it's over and it's fine. Dr Hackett comes to explain about medication and the need to rest for a week or so; no driving for a week; no flying for a fortnight - short-haul, or a month - long-haul.

'You've been unlucky to have this recurrence.' 'I don't expect there to be more trouble.' He goes back to Hertfordshire.

I eat well, my first food since 6.45 am. I feel in charge again. Even having to change rooms at 11pm is only a minor irritation for me. Even the lack of blankets doesn't worry me unduly; I can't be bothered to call the nurse. I think of keeping warm in a bivouac on a recent retreat in Wales, as I double up the blankets and top up the bed with my coat and dressing gown.

The next morning

Neither the phone nor the telly work in this new room; I don't particularly care. I have a civilized breakfast sitting by the window, the Daily Telegraph spread out on the bed, rather

than the Independent I'd ordered. Maybe since the retreat in Wales I am more welcoming of quiet times alone. There is never now any question of being caught with nothing to do.

I write this and slowly disengage myself from being a patient, wash, shave, have the Venflon removed, dress, put my new drugs in my bag, take a call from Dr Hackett, always calm, friendly and reassuring.

I wait for my middle daughter and her husband to collect me. It's lunchtime. Opposite me, in the entrance hall is a memorial shield and crest and this message: 'This is to remind each generation of an ANONYMOUS DONOR who was not unmindful of his neighbour's need.' It concludes with the hope that the Lindo Wing 'will remain for all-time a monument of his outstanding generosity' – a hope at risk of being betrayed as this 1930's building is hemmed in by massive industrial blocks of newly built hospital.

Back home to my wife and family, the house feels like an easy glove, the bed later that evening moulds to me. I take a phone call and break out in a warm flush; (that's why I need a week of recuperation). After the last two days I am still preoccupied with the image of my heart on the screen and the highly skilled hands that have cared for it. But it won't be long before I begin to feel the frustration of not being out and about again. Then this close focus on my heart will broaden into a wider more normal vision and the organ at the centre of my physical being will just get on with its hidden unremitting work, with a better blood supply and the usual taken-for-grantedness.

There now follows some commentary on this piece and the connections it makes with the theme of this chapter and my thesis as a whole.

Embodiment

I have never before written about my body with the same intimacy and intensity.

Merleau-Ponty says of perception that it is always embodied and 'grounded in our corporeal nature'. In Chapter 3 I referenced him when he says,

> **''It is the body which points out and speaks ... our gaze, prompted by the experience of the whole sensible world, and our gaze, prompted by the experience of our own body, will discover in all other "objects" the miracle of expression.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 197)**

Of the body Merleau-Ponty says,

> **'Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism; it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.' (Ibid., p. 235)**

This analogy between the heart in the body and the body in the world takes on a peculiarly strong resonance for me.

In his last work 'Visible and Invisible' posthumously published in 1964, he reflects on the experience of touching one's own hand. In such a connection,

> **'my body does not perceive, but it is as if it were built around the perception that dawns through it.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964 p. 24)**

Similarly of speech he says,

> **'The orator does not think before speaking, nor even while speaking; his speech is his thought.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 209)**

In my story of the angioplasty I am entering into an engagement with my body where what is normally invisible, but live and life-giving, became visible as I watched it beating on the screen. At first I was like the orator who is suddenly made aware in mid-flow of the formation

of his words. But then a new sphere of my bodily awareness opened up and became present to me as a recurrent movement at the corporeal centre as it was touched and pressured. The dye suffused through the arteries like black ink and the heart murmured and ached in response. I was, in those moments, my heart.

In-the-moment reflection

My decision to write throughout the procedure except while actual on the table was in part a hedge against fear. I notice now how I try to render the process in as analytic a way as possible. I specify the interventions and medication, the name of the surgeon, the literature available to me. But then at the moment of entry and delicate placing of the stent I find myself transported to a shamanic ceremony; even the table and the camera are dancing round me. The corridor ceiling viewed upside down from the trolley has become the untidy bottom of a swimming pool. It was not a matter of losing control so much as letting go and floating into the deluge of sensory experience. The clock was ticking and the sooner I was off the table the better; yet in a strange way this was uniquely my moment, my heart.

The drama embedded in the idea of only one chance of getting it right did not escape me. I notice too how I keep the context of family and home more lightly sketched in – no names, as if to isolate this extraordinary revelation safely away from home – in the Lindo Wing.

The overnight and the recuperation next morning found me holding the context of the hospital at a distance, – the refusal to fuss about blankets and the Daily Telegraph over breakfast – as I re-created my own normality. I am turning the ward into a scene from an Edwardian sanatorium. 'No kedgeree today?'; no I did not ask this, but I might have done.

Third person inquiry

I thought for some time about how to 'use' this piece of writing. I had concerns about how it would be read, but since at the time of writing I did not know who would read it, this may be attributed to some internal censor. In fact I sent it to the surgeon and my cardiac consultant and was pleased to hear back from them that they wanted to circulate it amongst their professional network, to which I readily agreed. I later heard that it had been read with interest as a reminder of what a patient may be feeling and thinking as they undergo this procedure. I reflected how different it might have been had I participated with them face-to-face and decided that this narrative is better told on the page. I was better able to express more reflectively what I had experienced through the first person process of interaction between myself and the text, which in some ways gave me a narrative separation from an

audience. The artistic forms of writing and reading are both nowadays normally silently practised; at least they were in this context. This allows space 'out-of-time' for the creative shaping of the text; similarly the reader can pace their reading and choose to pause for reflection, if they wish. 'Fixing' the experience in this way invites and supports the possibility for a reflexive response.

However the question of form in this story runs deeper than a choice between verbal or written presentation. The fact that the form of the writing is at times poetic in its imagery and that it addresses fear, discomfort and relief, marks this piece of writing out as a different genre from, for example, medical narratives. The aesthetic sensibility in choosing form, involves some imaginative projection by the writer into the experience of the reader and also into the social and cultural context in which the reading will take place.

Form and content have a dynamic relationship in meaning-making. It is not that there is an ideal form for a given content; rather the choice is always made in a particular context and therefore needs to be made thoughtfully out of the framing of that context.

As to its place here in this thesis, I decided to include the whole story as written as an example of my developing aesthetic in practice. I worked through the writing of the text as a way of coming to terms with the mystery, pain, fear, wonder of what was happening to me, although, like Merleau-Ponty's orator, I did not do it purposefully as some form of self-therapy. I re-lived the moment in the writing. Neither is it conceived of as a patient's guide to angioplasty. If it is of use or interest to others, that is to be welcomed but it is coincidental to the first person inquiry through writing.

Working again on this commentary, I sit here thinking of the small bits of metal that hold me in good order. Maybe Dr Hackett (that is his real name) is right; I will not need another.

I took pleasure in crafting the text; it flowed quite easily, like blood.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced and illustrated my own awareness of a developing aesthetic and how I use this in first and second person practice. What I have proposed is that aesthetic knowing is happening in any case, like breathing, and recognition of this through reflexive and creative inquiry provides a basis for better and more thoughtful choices. I have tried to describe a reflexive response to a heightened awareness; the discipline comes in noticing how this happens and in exploring different ways of representing it.

My particular way of developing this skill has been shown to be through writing and through iterative cycles of commentary and sense-making. In order to develop this thesis I have selected and examined in greater depth material which tells me about my own aesthetic awareness of practice. This is always for a purpose; even the personal story of my angioplasty found an audience and in doing so has influenced readers specialising in this form of surgery. Even without this readership, my purpose in writing was to come to terms with and understand what was happening to me in this unusual circumstance.

In this chapter I have also explored this personal aesthetic in practice through other journal excerpts. The first two examples were set in natural and urban landscapes. Using the methodology described in the last chapter I noticed what caught my attention and reflected on the significance not only of what choices had been made, but also of the way in which I had represented them in my writing. The third example showed what I perceived to be a filmic sequence of events whilst walking with people with learning disabilities in a London park.

In my commentary on the angioplasty story I found myself drawn back to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the embodiment of perception. I also discussed the issue of form and content and their meaningful relationship, which I see to be contextualized by the nature and purpose of each aesthetic interaction.

As this story falls into the category of autoethnographic writing, it is useful to conclude by considering how the use of such material might be seen to contribute to social inquiry.

Sparkes (2002) refers to the need for multiple criteria for evaluating autoethnography as a valid form of qualitative research,

> **'What substantive contribution to our understanding of social life does it make?**
> **What is its aesthetic merit, impact, and ability to express complex realities?**
> **Does it display reflexivity, authenticity, fidelity and believability?**
> **Is it engaging and evocative?**
> **Does it promote dialogue and show potential for social action?**
> **Does it work for the reader and is it useful?' (Sparkes, 2002, p. 211)**

He offers a view of the evaluation of autoethnography which is as multi-voiced and contextual as the texts themselves. I can apply the criteria positively to the angioplasty story, but can also see how useful it would be as the basis for a discussion with the cardiac consultants. The moment for this is passed. However I will keep these criteria in mind in subsequent chapters as a guide to shaping the story of my engagement with Silver Street.

In experiencing the intrinsic aesthetic of the thing itself, I have noticed the way this process sets up metaphorical connections and creates imaginative patterns of thought. It also generates feelings, as such moments warm, cool, excite, repel me. I develop relationships with what I experience, which then motivate me to act in one way rather than another.

As Gergen (1999) commented,

> **'... when I perform I am carrying a history of relationships, manifesting them, expressing them. They inhabit my every motion.' (Gergen, 1999, p. 133)**

Midgley (2001) too in her discussion of the participative relationship between poetry and science touches on this complexity,

> **'Consciousness is not something rare and exotic found only in experimental subjects or in scientific observers. Nor does it only show us a few special phenomena such as colours and dreams and hallucinations. It is not primarily an observation-station. It is the crowded scene of our daily lives. And the main dramas going on in it do not concern just observation or perception but quite complex, dynamic currents of feeling and efforts to act.' (Midgley, 2001, p. 118)**

Aesthetic knowing is not therefore without consequence or influence in both first person and second person inquiry. Through art and publication it can also influence first, second and third person inquiries, as it works through artefacts to prompt further sense-making in a larger community.

In the next chapter I will move on to describe how I noticed this developing aesthetic in practice influencing my arrival in and early connection with Silver Street. In Chapters 1 and 3 I described how I volunteered to spend time there. I sensed that this was going to be a different and more moving encounter than many others which come my way in the normal course of professional practice.

It was to elicit from me a response which was rooted in a different aesthetic, – the sounds, sights, smells, actions and words of a world where many of my familiar social conventions were brought into question. By committing myself to be there as an active participant and recording my perceptions of it, I was to explore how this developing awareness of the aesthetic would influence my practice. This called for a new receptivity and openness to the aesthetic I encountered, as well as to its representation in writing, pictures and subsequent discussion.

6 How does working in this way influence others?

6 How does working in this way influence my practice with others?

Introduction

The question that forms this chapter title is broad in its implications and my reflexive responses to it will be found not just here but also throughout the rest of the thesis. The value of the question is that it challenges me to turn my attention more to outer arcs of inquiry whilst still holding on to the inquiry into my own developing aesthetic which was the focus of the last chapter.

My intentions therefore are to,

- begin to explore the changes that follow from my developing aesthetic in practice
- to do so through reflections on my first period of practice at Silver Street as a volunteer.

This work took place in 2003 and now in 2006 I return to the extended contemporary journaling of this first stage of connection with Silver Street. I notice how some of these accounts have taken on an almost iconic status; by this I mean that they have crystallized around a particular action or image and I have endued them with a heightened significance as they inter-relate like beads with other episodes strung on the narrative thread of Silver Street. Individual stories have subsequently re-surfaced in different contexts either as verbal re-tellings or as written texts that were used in later projects in Silver Street and elsewhere. I do not therefore approach them as if they had been frozen in time and somehow acquired a fixed meaning; they are still live and capable of making new connections with me and others.

My decision to write and share what I was writing week by week was perhaps the most influential change in my practice. It stemmed from an interest in the place of journaling in my own first person inquiry. I had developed this through my participation in an MSc programme in Organizational Consulting at Ashridge that I completed before joining the Bath Doctoral Programme. However I had never before extended the readership of what I wrote to include the people I had written about.

Ellis and Bochner, (2000) describes the influence of evocative stories, as they,

> **'activate subjectivity and compel an emotional response. They long to be used rather than analysed; to be told and re-told rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted fact.' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 744)**

I think what I capture in returning to this first volunteer phase of the work, is my sense of risk and excitement in the openness of this offer. I did not know how the writing would be received. I wanted to push myself beyond what was then my current practice and establish a fuller and more responsive relationship with the people with whom I was to spend this time. In what follows in this chapter I will reflect on the extent to which this began to happen. I also notice that inevitably in exploring how my developing aesthetic influences my way of working with others, I cannot help but notice how theirs is synchronously influencing me.

In this chapter I will work with two journal accounts of meetings I held with staff at Silver Street. In the first of these meetings I introduced myself to the group as a volunteer/researcher; the latter part of this dual role not surprisingly became a focus of interest and curiosity. The second meeting came at the end of this first Silver Street project when I worked with a small group of staff, inviting them to reflect on our shared experiences of the intervening weeks.

I have chosen the initial and final meetings to focus on because, as occasions of transition, such events offer a number of insights. As was referenced earlier in Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*, Bateson (1972) was attracted to interfaces between systems of mind as places where there were heightened levels of learning about the news of difference. I will therefore explore my own sense of joining this community and also seek evidence of the ways in which this influenced my working with others.

Between these two accounts I include an analysis of one day's journal from the middle of this two-month period when I was beginning to orient myself in the very different world of learning disabilities. This will provide me with an opportunity to reflect on the experience of being with people with profound learning disabilities for a day. In so doing I shall explore the aesthetic processes at play in my noticing and responding to what happened, as we made connections with each other.

Making connections

In September 2003 I had got permission to work as a volunteer at Silver Street as a volunteer. It had taken some months. In my letter seeking permission from the Centre's management I had explained that any writing that came from the experience might be included in my research at Bath. I also offered to disguise the identity of participants and indeed the location and identity of the service. All material would be made available to be read and discussed within the Centre. If photos were to be included in the thesis, their use would be cleared by seeking consent from those involved and/or their parents or guardians. (This agreement was implemented in 2006, via the Centre manager.)

My strong intuitive attraction to spending time at Silver Street has already been outlined in Part A. I now include the account that I wrote after an initial meeting with staff. My subsequent commentary is shown in the right hand column. This was the beginning of a cycle of writing and response to writing in this first phase, (September '03 to November '03).

journal ... My first visit – 10/9/03

Journal	Commentary
I arrived at Silver Street as buses lined up to collect people to go home. During a brief hello chat with Fiona in her office, I heard a PA announcement calling all staff to a briefing. Fiona points out that this is my half-hour slot to introduce myself and my work.	I knew I was going to meet a group of staff, but this public address summons took me by surprise, a bit like a supermarket manager calling for more hands at the tills.
We go to a large room where staff are assembling. 27 of them sit in a variety of chairs around the edge of the room. I know fewer faces than I expect. I walk round handing out my prepared sheet of introduction. I say hello to each person as I give them their sheet. Fiona introduces me and I stand up to talk.	I had a strange connection in doing this with the memory of handing out exam papers to a class, – perhaps part of my adapting to my role in this moment.
I 'take up the strain', talking to the silent group. I follow the contents of the first few paragraphs of my	

sheet. I pause and ask for questions so far.
"What do you mean by 'thought provoking?" – a phrase I had written to describe my previous visits to Silver Street. In answering them, I'm straight into the middle of it. I explain that I realize how little I know about the world of 'service users' and how impressed I have been by staff attention to their needs. I am interested in understanding more about the lives of people who use the Service. What choices do they have? How are their lives proscribed, compared to mine? I have been impressed by the way managers have discussed issues of gender, sexuality and freedom for service users.

Phrases like 'thought provoking', 'change' and 'spirituality' became leitmotifs through the project.

I look to see what contact I have made with the woman who asked the question. (I later learn that she is Teresa, a support worker.) I continue my commentary on my written sheet; I say I want to work, not sit and watch.

The contact was positive and she became a warm ally through later discussions;

Teresa asks me if I can cook. There's some laughter around my admission that I don't but am willing to try.'

I can hear how she is 'grounding' me in the kitchen as a sort of playful test.

Reading this again at an interval I am still conscious of the tension in me of this initial encounter; I can recall the sensation of gears grinding as I sought to find a way of connecting with them. I was carrying an anxiety about the gap to be bridged between the group and me. Teresa's question led to a humorous resolution of this tension; in answering, I was showing more of the individual who had presented himself as being laden with all these challenging questions.

I take from this the need to tune in quickly to the aesthetic of the group – as well as is possible in the unpredictability of how such events unfold. Through repartée, we had found a

way of accessing the implicative story we were both interested in – 'What are you like? What am I like with you?'

The opening act

In this next extract I notice the way that my previously circulated written statement of intent provides linguistic hooks on which meaning could be tried and tested, as the group question me. (I also notice the painful 'hooks' metaphor that has surfaced here!) This was the dialogue I had not been able to have with their managers.

They are forming judgements about me and I about them, an initial sparring. I am beginning to find a refreshing directness in their questions, which leaves me feeling stimulated and alert.

Journal ... 'What do you mean by spirituality?'

Journal	Commentary
Someone has picked up this reference to spirituality and wants to know what I mean by it. Several others, including Ian and Nicole, add their endorsement to the concern about the word. I explain that I don't relate organized religion and spirituality that closely. To me spirituality means when a moment transcends the normal, when something happens which is memorable. I add that there is certainly in my view a spirituality about Silver Street. They are visibly relieved that I am not coming to preach or convert. I do however find myself wondering about how precisely I am using the word and what their problem of	Now I am not sure if they were being protective of the culture of the centre in not wanting an evangelist in their midst, or whether they were expressing a robust personal alienation towards organised religion, or both. I was glad that the query had been voiced; this told me a lot about the frankness that I could expect from them. My decision to publish all my journal writing meant that by reading this first entry they knew I was open to self-questioning and reflection. (In fact I subsequently dropped spirituality as an inquiry theme – or did I?)

definition may do to my inquiry if spirituality continues to form an important parameter.

Throughout I felt as though I could remain open to their questions and answer with authenticity.

Now as I reflect on this first visit, I know that my working there will be significant. Helge picked me up on my statement that I would be interested to see how being there, 'changed my life.' "Is that what you meant to say?"

"Yes," I replied, "all experience change us in some way."

Helge, a Norwegian manager, who had a year earlier been on my ten week supervisors course, would, I felt, have asked this out of genuine curiosity, not to trip me up. My confidence in this judgement derives from a continuing sense of dialogue with him. I could tell from the tone, pace and articulation of his question now, that he was sustaining that dialogue with me.

This theme of change recurs in later sessions. I now find my answer bland, maybe I said more than this? At the final session in this project the question came winging back, this time from Nicole and I had a second chance to reply.

The mis-en-scène of this meeting is still very clear to me; people sat in a variety of chairs, some hard and upright, others squashy sofas, scattered at random around the edge of the room. I had a sense of this being a brief and polite interlude at the end of the day and that they had a hundred and one tidying up chores that needed to be tackled in preparation for the following day.

What was being played out had a dramatic quality. It had resonances with a thousand and one moments of initial encounter, the new child entering the classroom, or walking into a room full of strangers at a party, or facing an interview panel. There was perhaps an element of Agon, or competitive play, (Huizinga, 1938, Caillois, 1958), in the testing, they of me and me of them. (Agon is one of the four types of play, briefly introduced in Chapter 4 and

further developed in Chapter 9, *Play in practice*. Suffice it to say now that competition is at the core of many games.)

The Agon in this introduction 'game' was as much an expression of my wish to present my case, as theirs in receiving another visitor.

Journal

I notice how tired I feel as I walk back to the car. Over the wall of the car park I can see a row of council houses, terraced in red brick. One has an enormous corrugated iron extension on the back the whole width of the house. In the garden is a large concrete Buddha painted white and a series of small shrines with joss sticks. My mind goes back to Maenllywd, to the Chan Buddhist prayer hall and my five-day retreat in a Welsh sheep farm. I am conscious of a network of human longing for something that transcends daily routine. Spirituality may have been on test this afternoon, but despite it all, it is flourishing, alive and well in the crevices between these blocks of housing. Buddleia grows too randomly out of the brick walls of railway embankments.

Commentary

This serendipity was remarkable for me and would have been unknown to the people I had just been with, had I not written it up in this shared journal. Already I am offering people a closer connection with my inner thoughts through the writing than I could easily otherwise do. This had begun to open up channels between me and some participants, which would later take on some of the attributes of friendship.

The buddleia becomes a poetic metaphor. It associates urban decay and the spontaneous burgeoning of life within this environment. It also spoke to me of the random but creative nature of the phenomenological nature of my reflections. Where would beauty shoot out between the cracks in the wall? I seemed to be discovering that it was waiting for me, not me for it, in a spirit of less purposive, more open inquiry.

This moment of departure contains another important theme, which requires some further exploration. My reference to a 'network of human longing for something that transcends daily routine' is sufficiently resounding, not to be left without some comment.

In analysing earlier journal items I have shown how in noticing the aesthetic in ordinary moments and finding ways of expressing it, such moments undergo a poetic transformation. They can acquire resonances, which set off further evocative acts of imagination and so cease to be ordinary and unremarkable. Here there may also be a connection with the claims made by Bateson, (1972) Fox, (2000), Abram (1996) and others referred to in Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*, that the aesthetic is a form of transcendence of everyday life and a way of re-connecting with the sacred.

I notice that I have found it easier to see this link through poetic imagery rather than in propositional ways. The transcendence is in the irrepressible buddleia and the iconography of the shrine set in so domestic an environment.

A day at Silver Street

There follow overleaf excerpts from my account of the fourth day during my initial experience of volunteering at Silver Street. I am to spend the morning with the Middleton Unit and the afternoon with Westfield, both for people with behavioural difficulties.

journal ... 'Day 4 – Thursday 30/9/03'

I started my written record with this introductory note to any staff who had been reading my journal week by week.

Note to readers:
I'm half way through the eight days I offered to come. Please add any comments you want to make, as you read, or catch me to have a chat, or, ring me on 01727 868063.
I'll be very interested in any responses you have.

Alan George

Journal	Commentary
I am there before mini-buses have arrived. I stroll round the building and hear some chatter coming from the Artscope room.	
Artscope seems more of a social hub than the staffroom. As Ian points out, there's always fresh milk for tea there. Keith, the main Artscope worker, has created a friendly lively environment, to which some staff naturally gravitate.	Throughout my time in Silver Street I had been impressed by the quality of this work and by the support this project gave to helping people who use the Service to express themselves artistically. Connections were made between the Centre, the Tate Modern and a network of practising artist in this part of London. Those service users who became involved were encouraged to exhibit their work and in some cases sell it. In a community where people are partially verbal and others non-verbal, this expressive channel was felt to be vital; it was an essential part of the life and work of the Centre. People's artefacts were on display in the corridors.
Keith explains that some artist/service users will be going to a studio this morning to see the firing of their ceramics that stand on a cupboard-top awaiting transport. One piece catches my eye. It is a very narrow chimney of clay, perched on top of which is a tiny human figure. Although the piece is	

probably only twelve inches tall the tiny proportion of the figure to the chimney makes it look giddily high. In producing it, the artist had made a reference to Fred Dibnah, the TV steeplejack. To me it also has a sense of Lowryesque isolation, part of an industrial landscape where a person is diminished in scale to a distant figure. No doubt there is a spectacular view and sense of freedom up there, as long as you hold on.

Here I find myself being imaginatively drawn into a form of dialogue with the chimney and its diminutive Dibnah.

I notice that my experiencing of people's aesthetic statements is causing me to re-position how I think about my potential practice here. I have just had to re-examine unaddressed assumptions about what I might expect from people with learning disabilities.

Another piece of ceramics awaiting firing, has a powerful, roughly fingered energy, which reminds me of the Jake and Dinos Chapman sculpture that won the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition prize this year. This coming together in my mind of two artefacts from such different sources raises questions about what counts for value in art. It encourages me to start from the assumption that if a work puts something out into the world that has shape and meaning for the artist, it is art; if it sets off resonances for a viewer, the art process lives on and grows in their imagination.

In this moment I became keenly aware that there is expressive life already here which can move me and others. This prompted me to reflect on questions such as,

- What burden of aesthetic exclusivity has my education and upbringing landed me with, that I should have been surprised about the link with the Tate?
- Where do I find this life in other organizations that do not have their own access to media; for example, where are the expressive opportunities in an office or a bank? In their absence how do people find a means of self-expression?

The first question in the commentary above raises an important issue for me about how I influence others. The intrinsic aesthetic of self-presentation is embedded in all interactions. For example I think of my consciousness, or lack of it, of how I sound when I talk or when I

respond to the humour or irony in a moment. These aspects of aesthetic 'presence' are in me, are me and are what I bring to the group.

However, when it comes to questions of aesthetic taste and choosing expressive activities, I, in my role as facilitator, need to be alert to the risk of imposing my preferences. (I discuss this further in Chapter 10, *Play in practice*, as a group of front-line staff spend a number of days with me in a cooperative inquiry.)

Reading the second question again, it would be naïve to expect an Artscope Unit in every bank. However, what would be involved in re-imagining such environments, so that there was room for an expressive aesthetic that recognized individual needs and aspirations, as well as organizational ones. It might even be good business. Pierre Guillet de Montoux (2000) quotes Joseph Beuys' claim that art is tomorrow's capital and describes organizations such as the Finish Bonk Business Inc. and the Christo Corporation that have survived and grown in a capitalist environment whilst espousing purely aesthetic aims and practices.

I now return to Silver Street and in particular to 30 September 2003.

Journal	**Commentary**
On the red bus	
Three of us, Gias, Gildette and I, set out for a trip designed to improve the social skills of Yannis, Joanne and Venetia. Initially we were to have taken Maggie. She had been moving around in the room with her jacket hood pulled down over her face. The occasional glimpse revealed a cheek which was scratched and bruised by her repeated self-striking, the same problem that I saw with Stella, last week, but with more damage.	In this community people may express their anguish and confusion visibly by trying to injure themselves. The jacket hood becomes a veil to shut off the world.
In fact we got no further than the corner of the road when it became clear that Maggie was not happy with the idea of a walk.	The fear of difference that I saw in this couple's faces is also to a lesser extent still in me although much diminishing as the weeks go by.
An elderly couple passed by apprehensively, as Maggie struggled against Gias' soothing, containing invitation to	

struggled against Gias' soothing, containing invitation to come with us. It was decided that taking Maggie today would be too much of a risk and she was led back inside and Venetia became her substitute.

When we turned into the High Road Yannis got excited at the prospect of going on a red bus. We wait at the bus stop as a stream of red buses come and go each greeted enthusiastically by Yannis' cry, 'Red bus'. I ask Gildette what was the thinking behind this sort of trip, as it was clear that none of the three people we were escorting appeared able to travel by themselves. Gildette explained that it helped prepare them for bus journeys with carers. In any case I could see that both Yannis and Joanne were excited at the prospect and that was as much a justification, if one were needed. Venetia also seemed calmer and more observant of the world around her here at the bus stop than when she had arrived in the room this morning.

This searching for an educational reason for going on a bus is quaint; I started it by my question. Whatever the programme notes for the day said in terms of learning objectives seemed palely propositional when compared with the spontaneity of Yannis' response to anything red and moving and the others' pleasure and excitement at being out and about. I am left feeling that in working with groups I must learn to be more attuned to the potential and actual play in practice as well as to the objectives.

Contact with the public

Our red bus arrives to take us to the shopping centre. I'm helping Joanne, a white woman possibly in her later thirties, although I'm discovering it is very hard to guess age accurately. She has already learnt my name and uses it to call my attention to her. She sings and seems so pleased to be out and about. I'm told that her mother has been in hospital for several weeks, during which time Joanne has been with a carer.

We clamber on to the crowded bus and try to make our way down to the few spare seats. The bus starts up and Joanne is very frightened by the movement. Although I am holding her hand, she immediately switches into her

am holding her hand, she immediately switches into her own safety routine, which involves sinking down and then sitting on the floor. I reach down to try to reassure her. An elderly man struggles up from his seat and moves out of the way. Gildette and Gias lean over to help and we get Joanne up into a seat. Fortunately Yannis is already sitting in front of her. Soon they are both keening and yelping with pleasure at the outing and I look round at the blank impersonal faces of other travellers.

I'm apprehensive about getting off the bus when we arrive; so too no doubt is Joanne, but it goes smoothly. Gias and Gildette check that their local authority ID badges are showing and we head off into the shops.

There's an easy flow between us. Sometimes Yannis or Joanne holds my arm as we saunter along. We look in windows and Yannis gets the idea that a cup of tea would be good. We pick up an Argos catalogue that might be useful for staff or for service users. Back in the Centre I had noticed one or two people enjoying the rustle of pages, as they flick through well used copies.

The cups of tea are bought in an indoor market. We're shown to a small bay where our rather ebullient and noisy group can sit without disturbing other customers too much. The young woman serving us is very friendly and seems quite happy that we should be there.

Venetia sits opposite me; I begin to catch something of her gentle nature, or at least that's how she seems to me today. She dislikes untidiness and is quick to re-arrange the salt and pepper pots on the table. On the next table Joanne has decided that the tea is too hot to

Knowing this much about Joanne's circumstances evoked an imaginative world of mother-daughter relationships. I thought of Winnicott's (1990) studies of attachment theory and child separation from mothers through hospitalization. How was Joanne, a grown woman, coping in her mother's absence?

The fear of difference was in most faces; 'avoid eye contact'. I am most acutely aware of it throughout the bus. Joanne, Venetia and Yannis have other things on their mind.

drink and keeps us waiting while she gets round to sipping it.

Then we are out on the street again looking for a bus back to the centre. I catch a reflection of myself in a window walking with Venetia, me in my sixties, white, tall, with grey hair; Venetia in her thirties, black, full of life, quite heavily built and with large dark eyes. She seems very content leaning on my arm. I find myself speculating what the myriad of passers-by make of us - father and adopted daughter perhaps, or maybe what we are, a person out window-shopping with a new found friend.

We need a 67 bus but they are in very short supply. Every other denomination of bus turns up in the half-hour we wait, but not a 67. It eventually arrives and we get on. Venetia is still on my arm and doesn't anticipate the slowing down and acceleration of the bus. I thread my free hand over a man's head to brace myself on a roof handle as I try to hold both our weights upright.

I remember this young woman's quality of being with us, which was a delight – no fear here.

Again it is this interface with passers-by that preoccupies me. Why is there this need in me to define my identity and role in this way? Do I normally do this?

Probably yes, depending on the circumstance but in a less self-aware way.

The image in the window becomes a metaphor for this search for identity.

In describing and analysing this morning trip I am aware of the perceptual interplay between our little posse and the travelling or shopping public. This came into sharp focus for me in the image captured in the shop window for a fleeting second. The fleeting chimera of the image intrigues me. The brief snatches of appearance of Venetia and myself create an external reference point to the novel circumstance we are in. It is as if in aesthetic terms I am reaching out for sensory data to confirm who we are together in this moment.

Equally my imagination rattles through possible relational answers, to try them out for fit, father/adopted daughter etc.

I was glad to be there; this simple action was my practice on this morning, stepping mimetically into and experiencing the role of someone who works with people with learning disabilities. Relatively brief though this was, I now see this practical association as a valuable part of my practice and a natural way of influencing through collaboration and friendship. I enter into the world, which engages my inquiry. Caught like this in the public gaze I am made more aware of this declaration of a commitment.

We, staff, service users and myself, shared in the aesthetic of shopping in an urban environment. Gias used the purchase of some items for the Centre as an opportunity for social skills practice. We experience travelling together and arriving safely back home. The random flow and connection with others was pleasurable for all of us in our different ways.

It confirmed my developing awareness of the difference that comes from my closer association with the day-to-day aesthetic and social experience of others. Walking along the high road as I accompanied Venetia makes it a different place. The sensory memory of our being together will re-surface when I walk there again.

How did this practice of being there influence others? It added to the basis of shared experience from which we approached the next stage of work at Silver Street. Gias, for example, was to join the cooperative inquiry group described in Part C. We all engaged in the same trip. My particular contribution, apart from participating in the morning, was through my written journal of the trip. In so doing I shared my experience as a newcomer with others for whom this was a familiar day's work. Within the scope of this first volunteer stage of Silver Street work, that seemed more than sufficient.

The afternoon

I now complete my description of this day in Silver Street.

Journal

Westfield 2

I spend some time in the afternoon in this, the last unit of my tour. Only four people are present, the rest having gone on an outing. The programme for this afternoon includes a relaxation session for those who remain. Mats are spread on the floor and Tina and other women are happy to lie down and rest to a CD of birdsong - which I know to be that of a nightingale.

Peter, however, cannot be persuaded to relax. At best he will sit briefly on the mat looking around for a convenient moment to get up and roam. David too is not tempted by the mat and is resolutely ensconced in a sofa, even through the end of the session when his bus is waiting to take him home.

Peter looks to be in his late 40's or maybe older, a sallow complexion on his lined face, which in his youth would have looked strong and fine. He is restless and wary of any contact I try to make with him. There is an impenetrability about the fleeting visual connection we have, as though

Commentary

This nightingale went on singing to the point of distraction. I hear them live in May in South West France singing in the middle of the night outside the bedroom window, not as now, forever off a CD.

But this is my aesthetic, my pleasure, my good fortune.

The electric nightingale in Silver Street may well please others here as much; it would be intrusive to try to find out. Why intrusive? I still feel to be a guest; it would be like querying the colour of someone's curtains. In any case no one here is complaining about it, – as far as I can tell.

neither of us can make sense of this random encounter.

Tina, perhaps in her 30's, is fitfully resting on a mat, but easily distracted by the arrival of a young male worker. The staff are relaxed and gentle in the mood of the afternoon. There is some playfulness around Tina's attraction to him. He handles her declaration of love professionally, but with just the right touch of warmth. I realize yet again how totally people in care rely on this mix of professionalism and humanity, and how vulnerable they would be to malpractice. The moment prompts me to think about the delicacy of service transactions which have to be framed within respect for others' identities and rights, but which still need to be brought to life by human warmth.

This playfulness was of the sort that goes on at street corners as teenagers sound out what it means to be with the opposite sex. It was a flirtatious game initiated by Tina. It appeared to me that she knew it was game and one that parodied what she may have seen elsewhere. She got great fun from it and it was handled very properly by the young male worker. It would not be difficult to imagine another very different scenario outside the professional context, but then there with strangers she would possibly be more reserved. The rules of the game here make clear this is not the real thing.

This last item needs further analysis. In introducing the play theme of this inquiry in Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*, I referred to Huizinga's distinction between play and 'real life', a theme that is explored by a number of writers including Barthes (1957), Bateson (1972) and Gadamer (1975). This exchange between Tina and a male member of staff also showed the importance of rules to the satisfactory playing of games. He acknowledged her ploy jokingly but said or did nothing which would have infringed the rule that this was play and not for real.

This might be seen as a metaphor for many inquiry relationships. They may be understood to be exploring, in a parallel but 'not entirely for real' arena of play, issues and relational dynamics that preoccupy people at work and in community settings. An 'away-day' may be seen as an act of going to a separate play space where different rules apply. Role relationships change with the introduction of a facilitator. I have noticed this in the ambivalent presence in the group of a team's manager who relinquishes some role authority

to me, as facilitator, whilst holding onto their personal authority of being the team's manager.

There needs though still to be a creative tension between the play and the real thing. The activities of the day must allow the group space to 'play' with what it needs to attend to, but to do so without regressing into the breaking of rules, which destroys the game. Aesthetic activities have a lot to offer to groups in enabling them to work positively and creatively with the balance between the play and the real thing. Because they work symbolically they sustain the relevance as well as the 'unreality' of the game. The poetic of the encounter can also be the territory where 'real' issues are explored dialogically. These themes will be considered more fully in Chapter 10, *Play in practice* and Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice.*

The completion of Silver Street-1

There was an extraordinary richness of experience for me as the weeks passed by. I found myself singing Kumbayah from a school hymnbook with Lina. I have included other stories in journal entries in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic of practice*, and elsewhere in the thesis, as they relate to the particular themes of aesthetics, play and poetics. Together they provided me with a fertile reflective territory and an encouragement to focus on the aesthetic in practice as my main theme of inquiry.

Seeking feedback

Having completed this first engagement with Silver Street, I was looking for ways of 'hearing back' from staff how they have experienced our being together. I had already had a warm sense of their appreciation of shared work. A number had also commented on their pleasure in reading what I have written. I wanted now to know in what ways these days have been different and what working together had meant for them.

In the journal entry below I recorded a concluding meeting with staff, which mirrored the one we had held at the start of this period of volunteering. These two meetings were the only part of my being there when I took responsibility for any form of overt structuring or programming. I notice how different it felt to be back in this role. I felt that I was tapping into their previous experience of group meetings – polite, friendly but not wanting to spend too long constrained by this format. It felt as if they were implicitly acknowledging a residue of unsatisfactory meetings. I was also conscious that I had a requirement to gather material from these weeks, as if the event would yield some sort of harvest, when in fact I had gathered a harvest just by being there and noticing the aesthetic of everyday life. Nevertheless there were some unexpected late blooms on offer.

In characterising the pattern of this meeting and the weeks that preceded it, I think of Patricia Shaw's description of organizational change,

> **'I am suggesting that we could approach the work of organizational change as improvisational ensemble work of a narrative, conversational nature, a serious form of play or drama with an evolving number of scenes and episodes in which we all create our parts with one another.' (Shaw, 2002, p. 28)**

She wrote this in the context of her work with the Italian based company, Ferrovia, where her consulting approach is captured in a series of narratives which do have a strong dramatic dimension to them.

I too felt that I had been in a play with a prologue and six acts; now, for the epilogue. In framing this experience in this way I recognise a growing alertness to play as a dimension of the aesthetic in practice. In Chapter 10, *Play in practice*, I will relate these experiences of a playful quality in practice to a theoretical understanding of play as an aesthetic expression.

In this case which I describe overleaf the play is intrinsic to the meeting and arose as a form of improvisation around a loosely structured script.

I felt I was inviting a different type of dialogue, where stories and pictures spark off other stories. It seemed to prefigure some of the qualities of cooperative inquiry, in a small rehearsal of what was to follow in Silver Street-2 and -3. In aesthetic terms, the meeting moves from one evocative story to the next, as people's imaginations are stirred by the improvised flow of the dialogue.

Journal ... Final meeting 13/11/03

Journal	Commentary
The room in which we are to meet, needs re-organizing from a hotchpotch of chairs into a circle for participants, numbers as yet unknown. People begin to gather. ... I have handed out the photos that I took during Black History Week. These are being passed round as we talk.	I notice how these photos acted as a way of unlocking dialogue and prompted the subsequent flow of stories.
Teresa has made a choice not to go to some other meeting but to stay here for this discussion. She has a Latin energy and earthiness; she speaks with fire and passion, eyes alight, arms gesturing. She explains what her reflections are, as she relates to those she is looking after. She has deliberately chosen to work with people with physical as well as learning disabilities, 'the hardest work', she claims. 'Why?' she asks herself rhetorically.	It was Teresa who had asked me in the first meeting if I could cook. This opening play had created a bond which now encourages her in the telling of this story.
She then gives her personal vision of her work. Sometimes she says, she is working on auto-pilot, for example, when changing people's incontinence pads. She mimes the automatic sticking together of these nappies, a task she'll do many times a day. But she also talks about her sense of fulfilment in getting to know each client, knowing their moods of happiness,	Her story is made all the more influential for me by its sensory detail.

depression, anger. She struggles to find words to convey these relationships, and settles for 'love'.

Later in our conversation I talk about 'deconstructing' my practice. She chips in, "You've been reading Derrida!"

This game around referencing Derrida was a brief gesture towards confirming a relationship with me. I was surprised by it and was left wondering where she had studied Derrida. I left it though where it landed, briefly acknowledging it and moving on. I could explore this further with her later.

My planned framework for the session had become deeply buried under the flow of conversation. It was as though my agenda had become the jazz classic around which the group, including myself are improvising, (Barrett, 2000).

Steve talks about an earlier job in residential care when he was left looking after ten clients single handed for four days and nearly went mad. On the basis of this, my first encounter with learning disabilities, I cannot imagine what that might have been like.....

This story spun off the earlier contributions. The meeting had come alive.

By this time, about a half an hour in, we are talking in a focused way often through stories. I point out how engaging these stories are for all of us. The energy increases when we look into them, as tellers or listeners.

I had prepared and circulated six pages of

excerpts from my journal. This is my repository of stories. I hope that they have had access to them as I had asked. I'm not sure that they have, but fortunately many have all read some individual accounts week by week.

I remind them of the Summer afternoon item in my journal from Day 1, (included in the previous chapter).

We talk together about the randomness of disability and the quality of life that organizations like Silver Street aim to offer.

I talk about the early challenge made to my by Helge about how I thought working here might change me. Nicole now cuts in and asks, 'Well, how has it?' My first response is to say 'read the journal'. I then explain that I feel changed in my understanding of learning disability and what it means to provide this service. I add too that I feel changed in my experience of facilitation.

I ask them how it felt talking as we have done during the last hour and a bit. 'Yes,' they say, 'it's been useful, but it wouldn't have been like this if you hadn't been here.' Ian says that they have been 'polite' because of me. I ask what this means.

He scans the group and looks at the assistant manager. There is a shiver of laughter around the room. Sometimes, they explain, their

The bringing back into the group of these texts further anchored our shared inquiry, as people recalled the sensory detail of the incidents and what they had felt at the time.

They were also hearing together how I had represented the life of the Centre. This will have been the first time for many that their work had been represented in this way through storytelling.

I noticed how different it felt approaching this question again with the experience of this first stage of Silver Street behind me.

The answer was much more evident in the journal and how I now felt in relating to people on a daily basis, than in the few words that I put together here. This reinforces for me how working in more structured aesthetic modes such as writing can support and deepen dialogue and in so doing generate different types of knowing.

meetings become unpleasant. I feel beneath all the good work, the commitment, the service, there is a glimpse into the darker side of organizational life, from which I as a volunteer, have been screened.

....

Suddenly the session has ended; people are anxious to get away. There are some very friendly farewells including an enormous hug from Teresa and some good words to me from a number of others.

I now think that this sense of shadow was just that – one of the passing clouds that are present in all groups. The fact was that this issue could be articulated openly. I was to pick up a fuller understanding of this when I started the next project.

The abrupt end to the second meeting resembled that moment at the end of a play, as an enrapt unified audience dissolves into exiting individuals and groups. We had completed the substance of our play together; there was no need to hang around.

In reflecting on this meeting, I notice how my stance throughout was spontaneously appreciative, (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2004). I felt that most staff were doing the best possible in a world which, as one senior manager put it, you either started to work in and got hooked for life, or you left within the week.

Conclusion

Much of the analysis of the two meetings described in this chapter has focused on conversations. Shotter (1993) describes the unfolding conversational process as,

> **'a changing sea of moral enablements and constraints, of privileges and entitlements, and obligations and sanctions - in short, an ethos.' (Shotter, 1993, p. 39)**

Shotter's fusion of the natural imagery of the sea and group dynamics is powerful. It captures the emotional flow of encounters as expressions of social and ethical relationships. It points ahead to a direction for my continuing inquiry. I was very conscious of the ethos of these meetings and could begin to hear some of the privileges and obligations that were surfacing on this swelling sea. My *privilege* was to be part of this dialogue. My *obligation* was to contribute to the work of the Centre through my participation. Shotter describes this as an ethos. I would as well call it the aesthetic of this community.

I chose to establish a relationship with the place and the people of Silver Street, that was open to emergence and which allowed time for the growth of shared dialogue and friendship. An approach similar to this has been described by Tillmann-Healey, (2003) in a paper entitled 'Friendship as method'. In it she gives an account of a process of researching into the lives and experiences of a group of gay men by establishing a network of friendship with them over a period of five years. The friendship I began to experience with people at Silver Street opened up a dialogue, which was very different in its longevity and degree of openness, from most of what had preceded it in my experience of practice.

In providing a reflective commentary on my journal entries I have begun to explore the themes of play that were embedded in these encounters. I had experienced playfulness in exploratory games and engagements with this new world.

I described how deciding to produce and publish within the Centre the artefact of my journal was perhaps the most significant part of this transition. In doing this I found a way of sharing something of my aesthetic experience of place, time and people. Its existence created a form of triangulation between the writing, the people, and me. They and I could use this artefact as a means of reflecting individually and together on what had occurred.

At intervals later in the thesis I will show how other representations of this developing relationship acquired further poetic and playful dimensions. These themes will be explored in Part C and D, both through inquiry into related literature as well as the story of subsequent stages of Silver Street work and other practice examples.

7 The Intrinsic Aesthetic in Practice

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Introduction

In this chapter I will,

- explore what the concept of the *intrinsic* aesthetic in practice means to me
- explore how sense-making through writing and photos deepens my awareness of the *intrinsic* aesthetic
- show how this deeper awareness influences my working with others.

I have selected for review and analysis material that illustrates my growing awareness of the intrinsic aesthetic and its contribution to my reflective practice.

My use of the terms *intrinsic* and *expressive* has already been explained in Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*. However I will briefly restate here that by *intrinsic* I mean an aesthetic that is an essential part of the fabric of all encounters, as it is embedded in the way we perceive each other and the world. As I referenced in Chapter 1, Taylor and Hansen (2005) claim that,

> **'... aesthetic understandings are so profoundly ingrained and unquestioned that their maintenance through the reconstruction of aesthetic forms in organizations seems so routinely ordinary.' (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1226)**

The intrinsic aesthetic is pervasive in human connectivity; it is as essential and taken-for-granted as air, something that gives life shape, colour, sound and texture, without our often being consciously aware of it. Rendering it more conscious both in the moment and through reflection after the moment, is a discipline that I have been engaged in through this inquiry. My purpose in doing this is to be better equipped to participate in a facilitative role with others, particularly in action research processes, but elsewhere in my life too. I also realize that my capacity to notice and represent such a rich profusion of experiential knowing is always constrained by the cultural selectivity and framing that I bring to it.

At the other end of what I have come to think of as a spectrum, lies an *expressive* aesthetic. This involves the use of consciously fashioned aesthetic statements and artefacts, ranging from informal expressions such as story telling, to more structured activities such as writing poetry or making drama. (I consider the expressive in detail in the following chapter.)

It is the facilitator who claims responsibility for introducing expressive activities into the existing intrinsic aesthetic of a particular encounter. The decision to work expressively with artefacts and arts-based processes requires both a heightened sensibility to this intrinsic aesthetic, as well as the capacity to anticipate the evocative and reflexive potential of expressive work as it unfolds. The two skills go hand in hand and their development will be the subject of further inquiry as I continue to examine situations where I felt this matching of intrinsic and expressive aesthetics to be happening.

I also notice and accept the paradox of inquiring into the intrinsic, through the medium of my own expressive writing. However as I will illustrate, the act of writing this current analysis not only imposes greater rigour on my inquiry, but also makes the process accessible to the examination of others.

The examples that follow are drawn mainly from consulting assignments other than Silver Street, that I undertook during the period of this research. (In fact, many of the Silver Street examples so far included in the thesis position themselves towards the intrinsic end of the spectrum.)

I have grouped them under the following headings,

- place
- artefacts
- relationships.

These headings suggest themselves, because place is the containing aesthetic environment within which organizational and personal artefacts are located, and where relationships have their own dynamic aesthetic which is intrinsic to all interactions. I see place and artefacts as predominantly poetic and evocative in the way they engage with my imagination; relationships express themselves more as a form of play through their unfolding narrative. However as I have earlier remarked poetics and play are not mutually exclusive and I have found it helpful to see aspects of each in the other.

Place

Arriving at a new venue involves a phenomenological participation with place as well as people. I consider the setting of events to be a significant part of the intrinsic aesthetic of what happens in them.

Journal ... **Gasometers, Part 1**

Journal

'We met in a 'regenerated' building that had previously been a coffee warehouse. It now contained a large Indian Restaurant where we would have lunch and a drama studio cum disco where we were to spend the day, fortunately with some daylight and access to a yard. Outside there was a striking view over the rooftops, of the cream painted framework of two deflated gasometers.'

Commentary

The sparse but specific detail I have used in writing about this place, may have left space for the reader to construct their own impression of this setting. The *Indian restaurant* or the *deflated gasometers* may have evoked connections which fill in this space.

I frequently write about venues and my journey to them; a more extended example, describing a funeral procession, was given earlier in Chapter 5 under the title *Terminal solitude*. This present example briefly sketches in some of the main features of this environment in which I was to work for a day with a group of local authority equalities staff.

The perception of 'place', the physical setting in which I work or live, has more than a topographical significance. Bachelard's (1958) pointed to the imaginal potency of the space that we call *home*, in his seminal work, *La poétique de l'espace.*

In describing this potency he identifies,

> '... the original fullness of the house's being. Our daydreams carry us back to it. And the poet well knows that the house holds childhood motionless "in its arms":
>
> Maison, pan de prairie, Ô lumière du soir
> Soudain vous acquérez presque une face humaine
> Vous etes près de nous, embrassants, embrassés.
>
> (House, patch of meadow, oh evening light
> Suddenly you acquire an almost human face
> You are very near us, embracing and embraced.)'* (Bachelard, 1958, p.8)
>
> * This extract is originally from a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke. Bachelard is quoting here from a French translation by Claude Vigée.

This aesthetic consciousness of place, which Bachelard understands as the profound imaginative reference to 'home', underpins the play and poetics of working with people in particular settings; they sense the familiar and unfamiliar in the environment and relate to it in different ways. I enter a strange room and breathe in what it has to offer, as actors do when walking onto a set. A sense of the transition of the day is marked by the sun's passage across the surrounding landscape. The furniture and other artefacts are imbued with associations and feelings.

An example occurs in my journal of a two-day event I facilitated with a group of lawyers.

Journal ... Enlightenment

Journal	Commentary
'In preparing the ground floor hotel conference room before the first participants arrived, I had adjusted the Venetian blinds, to let maximum light in, but also to obscure as much as possible of the kitchen delivery area and car park outside.	I notice on re-reading this item my aversion to the anaesthetic of conference venues, so thoroughly 'concierged', and drained of all personality – a room for all occasions.

On Day 2 after the coffee break the room visibly darkened and there was a noise of a lorry parking. I rotated the blind a bit and looked up. The view was obliterated by a lorry side with the word, 'SUNLIGHT' emblazoned across it, with a token yellow sun and a wavy blue landscape.

Maybe the DARKNESS lorry came after dusk, but I wasn't there to see it.'

This excerpt reminds me that the aesthetic of place is not static but changes in a systemic way with the flow of activity in and around the event. It also features a delightful serendipity in the arrival of the 'Sunshine Lorry'. This unexpected spotting formed a playful interaction with what was emanating from the place. The brief intervention that it made produced spontaneous laughter. The Alea of it falling into our shared consciousness was pleasurable. In some light way my own noticing of it and my permissive response to it was in line with that of the group, as we acknowledged the irony of its coming. In that sense it added some further definition to how we saw each other; it confirmed that we were people who would share playfulness together. It became part of the shared aesthetic of our working together.

Perceptions and feelings about the physical environment of any new encounter with a group or an individual, form part of the phenomenon of the incipient relationship. This sense of place is potent both in cases where I am moved by what I sense to be beautiful as well as when I am conscious of what I consider drab or ugly.

Place lives on with us in the very fibre of our language. Lakoff and Johnson, (1980), noticing the strong element of place in metaphor, state,

> **'There are few human instincts more basic than territoriality. And such a defining of territory, putting a boundary around it, is an act of quantification.' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 29)**

Amongst what we are enclosing in doing this is our aesthetic connection or disconnection with place.

Our relationship with place is therefore dynamic and the place is influenced by our noticing it, sometimes in quite practical ways as in the following continuation of the 'gasometer' example,

journal ... Gasometers, Part 2

Journal	Commentary
'Inside the studio we had almost too much space. I moved the rigid oblong of tables and chairs into something resembling a horseshoe. I felt the group might prefer to have tables, as they provide some spatial security, perhaps because this layout is associated with work, by contrast with just a circle of chairs which may suggest to some a more intimate or informal agenda.	
However I also set out two other circles of five chairs each in another part of the studio. I connected my Walkman and mini-loudspeakers and put on the Buena Vista Social Club CD, aware as I did it that several of the marvellous octogenarian Cubans who perform on it, have now died since making their extraordinary come-back from anonymity in the '90s.'	The choice of Buena Vista Social Club became my aesthetic 'visiting card', my best opening shot at connecting with people as this multi-ethnic group began to arrive. Of course not everyone accepts or keeps such cards.

I have included this short passage because it shows a transition from an awareness of an intrinsic aesthetic of place to my conscious choice to re-imagine and re-construct the space, which begins to become an expressive aesthetic act. The shifting of furniture is like a symbolic possession, which erases to an extent other people's presence in, and use of, the room. The further adaptation of the place by my choosing to play music in it is an expressive contribution which probably has a cultural reference to film or television programmes which rarely start without music. (I discuss this question of contingency between a group aesthetic and my own, more fully in the following chapter on expressive aesthetics.)

I now turn to the second of my three types of intrinsic aesthetic, – that is the artefact.

Artefacts

Strati (1999) defines an organizational artefact very inclusively as,

> **'... any characteristic of an organization which is able to 'tell' us something about the organization.' (Strati, 1999, Organization and Aesthetics. London: Sage, p. 11)**

Whether at the individual, group or organizational level, people choose and use artefacts which carry an intrinsic aesthetic significance. If artefacts are consciously chosen, they become an expression of taste, which 'tells' others what the owner/user wants to portray about themselves.

The extract below is from a journal entry in 2003; it follows on from the description of the funeral cortege included in Chapter 5. The excerpt needs some brief contextual explanation. The interview described in it was part of a day of preparatory research designed to equip me better to facilitate the annual board meeting of this community safety project. Mr Savindra is a well-established member of the local community and sits on many such committees and boards. My working theory in doing these interviews is that it will help me facilitate the event if I can have some prior experiential knowledge of the people who will attend and some provisional *sketch* of the community with which they are concerned.

During a round of interviews I visited Mr Savindra. *(A substitute name.)*

Journal ... Mr Savindra plays his card

Journal	Commentary
'I find myself let in anonymously through the steel covered security front door; he has been watching for my arrival on the monitor. In the hallway I wonder where to turn; the place is milling with people; there's a large dimly lit bar full of men drinking.	
"Hallo Alan!" a voice calls from a little office – Mr Savindra sits me down in front of his desk in a tiny office packed with an accumulation of his life's business.	

He hands me his gold visiting card, which includes his photo and his multiple designations ranging from financier to collector of coins, banknotes and stamps. It also announces that he is a school governor, a President of the local E African/Asian Welfare Society, Managing Director of the Croesus Investment Company as well as Director and Treasurer of this Community Centre.

On the wall behind his head is an array of photos of him with all manner of VIPs, Mrs Thatcher, the President of India and Tony Benn. (I am to divert our conversation later to this collection of trophies when we seem to have got into an impasse.) He starts to tell his story; ...'

Already taste has intervened as I make judgements firstly about the card – 'it is overly concerned to promote the man', – and then by association I am soon also making judgements about the man. 'His taste in cards is different from mine – what else might I find problematic about him in these opening minutes of our encounter?'

My experience of both artefacts and place is always that they are relational phenomena; I participate in them and add meaning to them by doing so. The place is always a place observed and perceived from a field of memories and relationships. The artefact likewise carries the traces of the person or persons who chose it, made it, handled it, placed it; in my seeing, hearing, touching, tasting or smelling it, I am connecting with this.

The skill that I am learning to develop in such moments is that of holding the aesthetic capta and noticing how they are influencing feelings and opinions. At a meta-level though I need to notice too that I am noticing, because the judgements that are beginning to form are improvisational and extemporary, and might otherwise be taken by me, as read.

In the process of further interaction I shall be engaging in an Agonistic play which has begun to define my brief relationship with Mr Savindra and is not without effect on my own sense of purpose in the moment. Wrapped around this is the issue of how he and I maintain some openness towards each other for the period of our working together. All this was embedded in the poetics and play of this moment of encounter. The reflexive discipline is now to try to unravel these strands. In doing this I strive to achieve a participation with the moment from a position of critical subjectivity.

Places and artefacts can be thought of as being 'peopled', even in the absence of people. The relational engagement of practice with others becomes a narrative of which these places

and artefacts form a part; they become the mis-en-scène and props of the relational play. The actors' interaction also has its own intrinsic aesthetic – what unfolds mutually in the moment. It is to this third area of my exploration of the intrinsic aesthetic that I now turn, – relationships.

Relationships

In this section I want to consider two relationships which I describe in different parts of my practice journal. In doing so I want to give particular attention to the intrinsic aesthetic that I was aware of in their making. The first of these is the remainder of my journal of the Mr Savindra interview. In the second I return to Silver Street and an encounter with a service user and her member of staff at Silver Street.

But first Mr Savindra; the scene has been set in terms of my analysis of the place and the artefact, his card; what does the unfolding play of our encounter add to this account of the intrinsic aesthetic in practice?

My reason for including this excerpt here is to add to the participative awareness of place and the artefacts in it, an in-the-moment awareness of the live action of practice. In doing this I draw on concepts of agonistic play and the telling of the incident begins to acquire features of dramatic dialogue. I am also aware that the example begins to position the discussion we were having, towards the centre of the intrinsic/expressive spectrum. Mr Savindra and I are not passive observers of the intrinsic aesthetic between us; in perceiving, we also express dialectic responses based on our perceptions.

As I sat down in his tiny cramped office, I have made an aesthetic judgment. I am aware that I initially do not like him, yet I am going to have to work with him.

Journal ... **Mr Savindra shows his hand**

Journal	Commentary
'He starts to tell his story; everyone is on the make and therefore they need to be checked up on by the few honest people that volunteer for such roles, such as himself. I glance for a moment through the window which rather like	I notice how my engaging with the strangeness of this setting pushes me to write sensuously. I want to participate in the sight and sound of this moment.

a TV production gallery gives a silent overview of the bar. A pinched looking man sits with his mates, their pints never long out of their hands. He has a Jack Russell terrier sitting on his shoulder as he talks. People on other tables all look as though they had settled in for a day of steady drinking; it's three in the afternoon. The world roars by this place on a raised motorway and only the canal loiters imperceptibly like brown tea.

His theories are Micawberish, hinging around the balance between income and expenditure. 'Those people in there drinking' have less income than expenditure, he explains, and are therefore always trying to cheat him. It's only by his sitting here from 8 a.m. till noon and checking up on them that he has been able to make the Centre viable. They all want money from him. But, he explains, he has made the Centre self-sufficient and he keeps people off the streets. The more he talks, the more total seems to be his vision of a corrupt world in which he is the only innocent. I feel that early on he has lumped me in the category of those on the make, through taking on this assignment and exploiting access to government money, 'Who are your friends who have asked you in to do this?', he says and I notice my hackles rise.

Half way through, I reassure myself of the impossibility of holding on to the role of independent

sound of this moment.

I people it with characters which might have been drawn from a Dickensian novel.

The movement I describe here of traffic and even the slow passage of water affirm the fuggy fixedness of this interior. No one is going anywhere, Mr Savindra included.

This play had become serious in a few short steps. The Agon of our encounter was barely concealed, but not yet ant-agonistic. The intrinsic aesthetic I experienced was that it had become a sparring match or perhaps more a form of elegant rapier work.

interviewer. I tell him that I totally disagree with his views, evenly voiced, no aggro, but no collusion. I don't see the world like this. I ask him what's in it for him to 'volunteer', what motivates him? When he says that he can size people up on first meeting, I ask him what he thinks about me, am I crooked? He wriggles out of this one by grouping me with him – 'we are OK, we know what is going on'.

The interview has turned out in a way he does not want, and I hadn't expected; he gets up to answer the phone. Then he says that he may come next Saturday for an hour or two to see what it's like. I say again firmly but I hope not angrily, that I would prefer him either to commit to coming or not come at all

As I open the door to leave, a young woman with a pushchair and three children is trying to come in. He will be watching the monitor; does he want them in? I hold the heavy door back and they enter; I leave.'

There had definitely been a cry of 'touché' after which Mr Savindra bailed out and I left, before too much blood was drawn on either side.

He did in fact come to the workshop on the next Saturday and stayed all day. He listened and made no inflammatory contributions. He participated and the few words we exchanged in the intervals suggested that we had both found a way of bridging the differences that we had uncovered. By noticing the tenour of his comments as much as what he actually said, I was able to hear some level of conciliation and preparedness to join in.

In attending to the physical location of the encounter and the personal artefact of the business card, I have tried to show how the roots of my noticing the intrinsic aesthetic lead on to a wider and more relational encounter with the man. I experienced this encounter as a form of agonistic play, a mutual sizing up. My perception of it in the moment was heightened; I felt at risk and challenged. In this I strove for an improvised performance which was authentic, but which shared some qualities of enactment of a stage role, including seeking an internal consistency of persona and engaging energetically with the unpredicted flow of the dialogue.

I now turn to a second example of the intrinsic aesthetic dimension of relationships, but this time in Silver Street. By contrast with the location of the last example, Silver Street was growing into a familiar environment. The place, artefacts and people engendered in me a developing sense of participation. As well as using my writing to explore the intrinsic qualities of this relationship, I was from the beginning of 2005 able to use photography as an expressive form.

Journal ... Making up

I spend an afternoon with a group of physically disabled women with profound learning disabilities; most of them are in wheelchairs.

Journal

This afternoon is to be a makeup session for the women service users who are left (the men having gone out on a trip in the mini-bus this week). The wheel-chairs are arranged in a row by tables and a series of cosmetics bags are produced, each with the name of a service user on an attached sticky label. The first task is to clean old nail varnish off and then replace it with fresh varnish and a quick-dry spray.

I offer to do a pair of hands and am tutored in this by a young woman worker who is already rubbing her service user's nails with cotton wool and cleaning fluid.

I do one person as an induction and it looks OK. I then ask Lorraine, if she would like me to do her nails.

Commentary

There are issues of gender and intimacy which hover all around this experience. I notice on occasions how carefully I have picked my words in describing it. This afternoon I felt as though we were reaching across a gap to be beside each other. Part of that gap was gender, which on this occasion proved a source of fun and happiness; part was a gap in the usefulness of words in this environment.

Having noticed this issue about communication in a largely non-verbal community, it helps me see that in all interactions elsewhere we

She is slumped in her chair, her arms awkwardly folded beneath her. I had already been caught in her bright gaze while I was waiting to see what I could do. Although she is physically very constrained by her disability, her eyes are lively and limpid. She appears to be taking everything in.

When she realises, that it is I who will do her nails, she stirs in her chair and her face melts into the most delightful smile, whether because of the novelty of me or of having a man do her nails, I cannot tell. Her smile reveals a mouthful of much-filled teeth and gaps. I wonder how people with such disabilities cope at the dentist.

There is general merriment about Lorraine's response amongst the women workers around the table. As I settle down to do the nails, I concentrate on not getting the varnish on her fingers and to keep it as smooth as possible. I look up and Doreen, the key worker, looks across and gives me a thumbs up.

live with, guess at or unaware of, the gaps in our capacity to communicate. I explore Linstead's (2000) concept of the silent implicative double in Chapter 11, *The poetics in practice.*

I referred later in my journal to the female coterie of this event to which I had been temporarily admitted. This was a remarkable connection in providing a basic service which brought me literally 'in touch'. The flow of emotional energy from both sides of the hand contact was life affirming for me and I am fairly sure for her. It was as though the purpose, – to varnish nails, – valued and affirmed a service offered and received with pleasure. It was beyond words and primal in its physical connection. There was something playful about it, hence the laughter and smiles. It was unexpected and therefore had not become deadened by habit.

As I re-read this piece and its associated commentary written not long after the event, further insights into the aesthetic dimension of it come to light.

My language in the left hand column is comparatively free of metaphor, sparse in its description. It is in the later right hand column that I introduce propositional and allusive interpretations.

Yet what now comes through for me between these two views of what happened is a glimpse of the ritual of the action itself, the painting of nails; it connects with the washing of feet, the

plighting of troth, the handshake of world leaders on the signing of some treaty, the simple act of sitting hands folded together – connection.

It arose spontaneously in the moment, carrying the resonance of many other more ritualised moments in its shadow. The play of the nails had at the time a poetic essence which defied elaboration; it was there in the improvised moment which led to a phenomenological knowing which was only possible in its embodiment and its spontaneity.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) describes the relationship of body and the perceived world in the moment of action. He gives an example of the act of sewing, an action that is carried out without our having to examine our fingers, the scissors, thread and material. What we experience, he argues, are the *potentialities* which are already mobilized by perceiving the scissors and needle; for the person sewing, they become **'the central end of those 'intentional threads' which link him to the objects given'.**

He continues,

> **'It is never our objective body that we move, but our phenomenal body, and there is no mystery in that, since our body, as the potentiality of this or that part of the world, surges towards objects to be grasped and perceives them.' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 121)**

This nail painting connection expressed the potentiality of our phenomenal hands, as in our differing ways we became aware of our action together.

On a subsequent visit I had the opportunity to use my new camera and took the picture overleaf of Lorraine and Kuldip, who was helping her prepare for lunch.

Lorraine with Kuldip, her care worker, preparing for lunch, no nail varnish on today.

Commentary ... Lorraine and Kuldip

Although at the time of taking the photo I had only had a brief chat with Kuldip, her care worker, I feel the picture draws me into a closer connection that will influence me next time I meet them both. It captivates me by the warmth of the relationship between the two.

There is also a sense of the aesthetic of the place in the semi-privacy of the room emphasised by Kuldip's supportive arm, with only a glimpse through the open door of the larger space of the unit beyond. As a capture of a spontaneous pattern of limbs, heads and bodies, it has serendipitously created a remarkable icon of caring love. I would compare it in this regard to the video art of Bill Viola, (Kidel, 1996) which, with the added dimension of movement, imbues facial responses and gestures with transcendental significance. The image of Kuldip and Lorraine belongs to an iconography of maternal love or the protection of the vulnerable against a hostile world. In their direct gaze at the camera they seek recognition and connection.

As I pointed out in Chapter 4, *Inquiry Methods*, Barthes remarks on the phenomenon of replicability, '**what the photo reproduces to infinity has occurred once only**', (Barthes, 1980, p. 4). The aesthetic of visual representation offers a potent way of externalizing thoughts and feelings and I explore some of the impact of this in the third piece of work at Silver Street, the description of which can be found in Chapter 13, *The news of difference in Silver Street-3*.

At the core of this example is a process which is both dramatic and poetic. I have never heard Lorraine speak, at least not in words which I might understand. Yet in her acceptance of me in this domestic encounter she has given me something unique, the most valuable part of which is beyond speech and therefore essentially poetic.

The significance of this discovery cannot be underestimated. It taught me that the poetic could be experienced in such heightened gestures and interactions whether or not they were voiced. It was to be found in the fusion between a simple domestic act and multiple metaphorical and symbolic meanings that resound in its subsequent telling.

Primarily though, it happened; we were alive to it as an action. I have shown in my commentary above how this relationship set off in-the-moment references and connections with other dramatically charged clasping of hands.

Her life is proscribed and supported by the care and love of relatives and the staff at Silver Street; her smile radiates energy. In writing about our meeting and the photo of a later moment I am adding my images that point towards the essential poetic in this encounter. In your reading this, Lorraine now has a form of evocative extension of her life in your imagination.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused particularly on exploring what I mean in using the term, *the intrinsic aesthetic of practice*. My method in doing this has been to use fragments of journal relating to the aesthetic inherent in place, artefact and relationships. My opening proposition was that the intrinsic aesthetic is continuously available to be experienced in the moment, as distinct from those expressive activities and processes which are consciously introduced into practice. I suggested that it is helpful to think of *intrinsic* and *expressive* as two ends of a spectrum.

The intrinsic aesthetic of place was explored through two short journal excerpts and I referenced the work of Bachelard on the poetics of space. I then considered the artefact as an expression of the intrinsic aesthetic that we assemble around us and which may, like Mr Savindra's business card, speak volubly. However I recognised that this 'voluble speech' is co-created and also imbued with values by the observer, a manifestation of our participation.

Then I moved on to consider relationships as a dramatic narrative within which these intrinsic aesthetics play out. I noted that whilst the examples of place and artefact where primarily poetic in nature, the relationships examples which followed were more usefully understood as forms of play. In completing the Mr Savindra story, I observed that it took on the form of agonistic play as we sized up each other's values around his proposition that the world is full of people 'on the make'. Beneath this surface was a deeper suspicion of me, the researcher/facilitator 'on the make'. This may have been dispelled at least to the extent that he subsequently decided to join the forthcoming workshop.

The Lorraine nail painting description and the photo of Lorraine and Kuldip offered an example of embodied knowing and the sense of connection that springs from this unspoken encounter. I commented on the dramatic dimension of the evocative account of the nail painting and the iconic impact of the picture, both of which I experience as having their roots in a poetic narrative.

All the evidence of the intrinsic aesthetic in the examples used in this chapter contributed to the way I perceived and related to people and places as I worked. In noticing them, I was more attuned to the improvisational process of practice and more able to build on this reflexive attending to them, as I chose how to respond.

The direction in which I sensed my practice to be moving at this time was to relate the intrinsic aesthetic that I was learning to 'read' more subtly in practice, with exploratory uses of expressive aesthetic statements and processes, and to do so in as contingent and artful a way as possible.

It is this expressive end of the spectrum to which I turn my attention in the next chapter.

Working sketch – Snow break, 10/2/06

As I walk over a field of frozen snow, my next footfall produces the most amazing sizzle; tiny shock waves run out across the white. I hear the snow crust fracture in all directions radiating out to the edge of the field around my footfall. Its brief frisson also runs through me as I look and listen, then walk on. The snow comes alive in the bright sun.

This is the moment that offers itself to me as I write. It is an unsolicited recall of an experience in my twenties. Some connection between this snow image and a sense of sudden shifting, a loosening of an impasse in writing has called up this memory.

Reflexivity is decked out in sensuous imagery and is profoundly metaphorical.

8 The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice

8 The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice

Introduction

This inquiry into the expressive aesthetic in practice complements the focus of the last chapter on the intrinsic. Here I aim to,

- define what the concept of an expressive aesthetic means to me
- give a critical account of my current experience of expressive working
- reflect on some of the issues of facilitation raised by working in this way.

The *expressive aesthetic* is a term which for me encompasses the conscious fashioning and use of aesthetic statements and artefacts, ranging from informal expressions such as story telling, to more structured activities such as writing poetry or making drama or a wide range of other media such as painting, graphics, audio, video, modelling, carving and other forms of expression.

There is a natural contingency between working with expressive processes and an action research approach; Heron and Reason's (1998) definition of presentational knowing within an extended epistemology has already been referenced in Chapters 3 and 4. The fact that expressive activities are often designed as communal events also chimes well with the democratic and participatory nature of action research.

In this chapter I will start by framing the discussion by posing two epistemological questions that arise from my experience of this way of working with groups.

I shall then move on to describe and analyse three different types of processes – the embodied and kinaesthetic, the evocative and the constructive.

Framing expressive practice

Two issues arise for me in reflecting on my own experience of participation in expressive processes in the context of workshops and similar events. I briefly touch on these now as a way of framing the examples I shall analyse in the main part of the chapter.

The expressive aesthetic in practice – is it art?

Firstly I found myself questioning the relationship between expressive activities in practice, and the form of art-making, which takes place in concert halls, galleries, theatres and so on.

In what sense, for example, can the claim to have engaged in writing poetry in a workshop session be squared with what I perceived to be the complex and disciplined crafting of poetry, as practised by poets?

This might be seen as another rehearsal of a familiar argument about the difference between process and product. The workshop activity might be justified in terms of the process experience of making and appreciating what has been made, rather than in the expectation that the product will be 'published' for audiences beyond those of the workshop.

Winter (1999) claims however that these two types of artistic creativity are not different in kind but form part of a creative spectrum.

> **'Let us, then, argue that the capacity for artistic creation is something we all possess, that professional reflection can therefore not only draw on our own ability to appreciate established works of fiction, but also on our ability to create fictional structures which are intricate, complex and successful, as a way of developing our understanding of experience.' (Winter et al. 1999)**

In Chapter 6, *How does this way of working influence others?*, I discussed a related issue arising from my viewing of the Artscope ceramics and the 'Dibnah' chimney. What I had approached as the outcome of a therapeutic artistic activity process, had acquired the sort of validity that made it worthy of exhibition and purchase as a product. Keith, the Artscope worker, was very clear that they 'do art as art', not as therapy.

I therefore want to test the proposition that the more that artwork with groups has its own integrity and meaning for participants, as art, the more insightful the moment of using it, whether or not it merits dissemination beyond the moment of its construction.

An improvisational aesthetic engagement

The second issue that I want to consider in this chapter concerns the relational context in which expressive activities occur. As Nevis (1987) shows, the *presence* of the facilitator is a very important factor in the relational pattern of group events. Presence is largely perceived through aesthetic capta, as people listen to, watch and respond to the facilitator.

However, individual participants also bring their own presence, which embodies their own aesthetic identity and tastes. Expressive activities are contextualised by these aesthetic

relationships in the group, as people perceive each other acting and talking. These perceptions inform the way they connect or disconnect, ally or separate.
This improvisational aesthetic engagement is the given field in which figural expressive activities occur.

For example, part of my developing 'presence' as a facilitator has been to use music to create a sense of the difference between this temporary environment and everyday work. I tend still to use it selectively and lightly, but now know that it is worth checking how a group feel about this. I have also invited people to bring their own CDs and found myself on the receiving end of music that I would not have chosen; but that is an expression of the democratic framing of action inquiries.

In this chapter therefore I shall hold in mind these two issues, – approaching expressive activities as art, not therapy, and secondly, being sensitive to the relationship between chosen activities and the intrinsic aesthetic of a particular group. I propose to use my practice in expressive processes as an exploratory space to learn better what seems at present to be valid for groups and for me in this type of practice.

I experienced many of the expressive activities described in this chapter as seriously or lightly playful. They were sometimes accompanied by laughter and pleasure in the process of acting or making. I will reflect on what this tells me about play in practice as a creative process. The examples have all been drawn from other consulting work that I was engaged in, in parallel with Silver Street. (In Parts C and D I also provide examples of a growing use of expressive activities in facilitating two cooperative inquiries in Silver Street.)

Three types of expressive processes

There are no doubt many ways to cut this particular cake but I have found it useful to think of expressive processes within the following typology,

- *Embodied and kinaesthetic processes*

  By these I mean communal activities which are to do with eating, drinking, walking, climbing, pursuing a sport, dancing or playing games together within a particular environment. They are consciously expressive and complement the intrinsic aesthetic of place discussed in the previous chapter. They are all the consequence of decisions made by those who facilitate events.

- *Evocative processes*

  By 'evocative' I mean activities which are designed to evoke responses to selected objects or *objets trouvés*, or by listening to music, live performances of dance or theatre, looking at films, pictures or reading poetry.

- *Constructive processes*

  The emphasis here is on making artefacts such as models, pictures, murals, sculptures, happenings, poems, stories, publications, songs, music, plays, photos, radio programmes, videos, dramas or websites.

I now consider each of these three types of expressive process in turn.

Embodied and kinaesthetic processes

Under this first heading I include processes that are to do with the choice of the place and social setting in which events are held, as well as the physical activities that are possible within it. I see this category as offering a bridge between the intrinsic aesthetic discussed in the previous chapter and the present focus on those more expressive processes and activities that result from conscious decisions on the part of those who organize and facilitate events.

In 2002 I had attended the 5th Arts and Business Conference at Castle Borl, Ankenstein in Slovenia, an event animated by the Slovenian violinist, Miha Poganik. The historical resonance of this castle standing high above the river Drava was remarkable. It was at a time when I was still refining the purpose and direction of my inquiry and the event had the effect of bringing many of the issues addressed in this thesis into some form of initial focus.

The food was provided by a young German team calling itself, Eat and Art, whose aims include 'to gather society, culture, economy and art all around the same table'.

Their leaflet explained that,

> **'The senses of smell, sight, touch and hearing are all activated by the preparation and anticipation of a meal, and the sense of taste is the ultimate sensory reward.'**

Only an Anglo-Saxon in the most puritan of traditions could fail to understand that cooking and eating food together is a positive aesthetic experience. When they take place in the

context of group work, they change the quality of experience in the event. This is a very literal example of what I refer to as embodied processes; you eat what you make.

In Chapter 6, *How does working in this way influence others?*, I mentioned that, during my induction to Silver Street, Teresa had teased me about my cooking, or lack of it. The preparation of food and communal eating in small units at Silver Street adds enormously to the sense of family. (Although I have not been let loose on cooking, during my visits I do my fair share of washing-up and feeding people who need it.)

The impacts of the surrounding social or natural world such as the sight, smell and sound of landscapes and urban environment are an indirect but influential consequence of design choices by the facilitator and/or the client.

Place also featured in my discussion of the intrinsic aesthetic in the previous chapter. Here however I am considering the expressive dimensions of choosing and using *place*, which result from the aesthetic judgments of whoever organizes the event.

The example that follows encapsulates many embodied and kinaesthetic processes. I attended a Buddhist retreat in Wales. The extracts from my journal for this five day period illustrate how the choices made by the organisers created a distinct aesthetic experience of eating, living and sleeping, which were very congruent with the meditational purpose of the event – to gain new insights into meditation, mindfulness and action inquiry.

journal ... Maenllwyd Retreat, 22 – 26, April, 2003

Journal	Commentary
Wednesday ... There was a sharp frost last night. I had a miserably cold night – my feet would not warm up. I woke repeatedly to bleating lambs, bellowing cows, which seemed almost to have entered the miniscule tent that I had borrowed before coming on this retreat. (I had chosen not to sleep indoors.)	This note about discomfort prompts me to reflect that expressive processes may be challenging. The aesthetic, as Strati (2000) points out, is present in the other-than-beautiful. (In this case I could have slept in a dormitory on a bunk

This place is authentically late-Victorian in its lack of domestic sophistication, but paradoxically our coming together has been made possible through high tech travel from New York and Copenhagen, as well as UK. There's no electricity – just water, wood, calor gas and oil/paraffin.

bed. I chose to bring a tent and therefore lived with the aesthetic consequences, including waking up to white frost across the fields.)

...

We had time for a walk this afternoon – still as a silent meditation. The hills are superb, a flattened lattice of hedges which follow the landscape, letting in and holding back drifts of sheep with attendant lambs. I heard a cuckoo, willow warblers and saw a distant pair of buzzards being mobbed by crows – all this, despite a prior injunction from the faculty not to regard this as a nature walk, but a further act of meditation!

The setting was superb and seductive to the extent that for me it undermined the austere injunction not to have a nature walk.

Thursday

A grey dawn with exercises in the yard at 5am between the house and the Chan Hall.

...

Buddhists believe that dawn is a time when meditation is less invaded by distracting thoughts. The grey light in the East and the routine each morning of our exercise class brought the body into meditation.

I'm writing this at 2.10 pm in a rest period. I'm huddled by an oil-burning stove.

There's a smell of frying onions and courgettes coming from the tiny kitchen, where the resident cook, Pamela, is preparing another delicious vegetarian dish for this evening. The food is universally appreciated, judging by the speed with which it is consumed.'

The smell, the taste and the warmth of this moment will stay in my memory.

Structured communal living created a sense of simple purposefulness which made much of the business and expense of my normal day-to-day life seem costly and distracting.

Grouping all domestic chores into two intensive periods in the day resulted in a very clean and well-run house where no one was servant to any other. Nothing was wasted and most things returned to the cycle of decay and growth – a form of living out values in a very visible way.

This was a rare and remarkable experience, a fusion of the natural world with a well ordered way of living in which taste, smell, dawn and dusk were experienced through a sharper perceptual focus. The kinaesthetic of walking, exercise, sleeping on the ground, sitting for 45 minutes at a time in silent meditation, all contributed powerfully to my experience of the event.

Not all events can be set in such an empathetic environment; neither on the other hand would everyone necessarily have found it empathetic. Sensitivity and judgment are required in situations where people have little choice over whether they attend or not, unlike Maenllwyd where we were willing participants. This connects with the second of the framing questions I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Whilst I would not choose experiences and settings that, out of perversity, challenged people unduly, whatever choices are made and offered will please some people more than others. The group has to be invited to resolve how they proceed collaboratively; this becomes part of the learning.

Reference was made in the previous chapter to Merleau-Ponty (1945) and his claim that it is in the phenomenological domain, not the objective, that the body and the perceived world unite in embodied action.

This suggests to me the importance of recognising how the environment and the activities that happen within it contribute to forms of embodied knowing in practice. The physical relationship and presence of each person in a given space become part of the knowing. Movement, whether through dance, walking together or simply breaking the pattern of seating and creating new groups and arrangements, might be seen as a form of what Merleau-Ponty referred to as 'intentional threads'; the group participates in varying degrees through their bodily presence and movement, in the co-construction of meaning in being together. This is intrinsically embedded in the bodily gestures and stance of people as they sit or move together. It becomes expressive as the group chooses to participate in different spatial structures and movements.

An example of the latter might be the circular dance movement used to introduce people to each other at the start of the CARPP Emergent Approaches to Inquiry conferences in Stroud.

A simple repetitive sequence of steps is taught and then enacted to music. This has the effect of rotating participants round a large oval in the room and in the process allows them to notice and simply acknowledge who is attending. (I and a colleague have by the way subsequently tried this with a group of 80 lively young charity workers at their annual conference and it descended into hysterical chaos as the music was drowned out by their whoops of recognition and laughter – another powerful message about reading and meeting the intrinsic aesthetic expectations of the group!)

I now turn to the second type of expressive process, which I describe as *evocative*.

Evocative processes

Activities that I have included in this type involve the facilitator inviting the group to work with existing objects or artworks and the reflexive and imaginative responses that they generate. The group members may also be asked to bring their own material as a stimulus to reflection and dialogue.

My experience is that most people can participate unselfconsciously with such activities.

Object-related play

I have used a variety of objects as a stimulus and focus for storytelling. I took into a session for managers a clockwork Ferris wheel made of folded tin and complete with little passengers in each carriage. We were working on a theme of work-life balance. I kept it out of sight till needed. Then winding it up and leaving it to run on a table in the middle of the circle till the end of its spring, I asked people to watch and experience its movement and sound. I then invited them to write down any ideas that came to mind about the relationship between work and non-work sides of their lives.

For some this moment evoked pleasurable reminiscences of childhood, for others wistful recollections of relationships. Others relived thoughts of fear, risk and danger. We then listened to each story to honour the feelings raised by this evocative activity. A measure of its effectiveness for the group could be found in the quietly engaged attention, which each contribution received.

In another example, a group of staff running an equalities service in a local authority were invited by me to bring to the start of an annual away-day an object which 'says something interesting about your participation in this work group',

journal ... A tomato called Big Boy

Journal	Commentary
'... There were several offerings of fruit and plants by individuals, and much laughter from Collette and others about the tomatoes, a crop called 'Big Boy', bought for the occasion by Anando. He explained that, were it later in the season, they would have come from his garden. 'I grow nothing that cannot be eaten.' By coincidence Collette had also brought tomatoes, but they were minute, so again a lot of laughter broke out at the contrast.	This one statement by Anando offered an incidental glimpse into his life and values at home.
I speculated on the playfulness of this exercise as other people went on to reveal little hints of what they wanted or were prepared to say about 'their participation in this work group'. A lot of the energy in the laughter came from Collette and her ready sense of humour. I know too I connect very quickly with this tendency in the group. The activity had become a piece of play, an imaginative projection into the chosen object, of some feeling about work.'	I notice the aleatory play or chance in this activity, which derives from the unscriptedness of what people choose to bring and the fortuitous sequence of objects as the activity progresses.

My syntactical structuring of the words of invitation to bring an item that – 'says something interesting about your participation', – also now strikes me. The fact that it belongs to a narrative of group work where, objects can speak, itself implies an act of imagination and playfulness. It was also an advanced notice of the intuitive and metaphorical approach in which I was inviting them to participate.

Elsewhere in the thesis I include other examples of these evocative processes as my practice continued to change and develop. For example in Part C which follows, I will describe a use of post cards in an evocative exercise on the first day of my action inquiry with front-line staff in Silver Street-2.

There is also a quality of Alea about this activity, as the cards provide a random but creative point of contact with the interests of the individual group members. This chance element allows feelings and comments to surface that have been evoked in the imagination. Because they spring from an aesthetic response to an image, they are less filtered by the conscious mind and therefore work as triggers to more reflexive inquiry as people notice the unexpectedness of their revelation.

Reading poetry as inquiry

In Chapter 11 I shall consider the concept of the poetics in practice. Indeed the theme of poetics runs through much of my commentary on my practice. In this example of evocative processes I describe a reading of a poem, which by chance had a remarkable impact. The account comes from work I have been doing over a number of years with a professional group. During this particular annual away-day, I had brought with me my copy of an anthology of poems, called 'Staying Alive', (Astley, 2002).

One member of the team had privately told me earlier in the workshop that she had just handed in her resignation so that she could start to retrain for a new alternative career. Now towards the closing of the event, I read them a poem, Robert Frost's (1969) *The Road not taken*. It is the poem that starts,

> **Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,**
> **And sorry I could not travel both**
> **And be one traveller, long I stood**
> **And looked down one as far as I could**
> **To where it bent in the undergrowth;**
> ....

My journal continues,

journal ... The road not taken

Journal	Commentary
I cannot recall in my reading quite when I realised how totally appropriate it was, as an introduction to her resignation announcement to her colleagues. I certainly knew by the time I got to the final two verses. I looked across at her; she was smiling radiantly. She made her announcement. Later people were to tell me that they had rarely seen her look so light and happy.	I realise that it was the relief of making the public announcement that showed in her face, her lightness and happiness, but the Frost poem had provided an elegant commentary on what she was about to say.
Before setting off on the tedious M25 drive back in the Friday evening rain, I offered a lift to a participant. He talked throughout the two and a half hour journey about his life, his family and his aspiration to find greater spirituality in his life by returning to his homeland. I realised that the Frost poem had spoken to more than one person in the group. He quoted me several lines of Yeats' 'Sailing to Byzantium'; I responded with lines from 'The Magi'. He said he was struck by my peacefulness, 'Nothing seems to phase you'. I said I was glad it seemed like that, but of course I could be phased.	It also opened the door to the second conversation that was to follow on the way home.

Poetry offered this degree of openness of connection with the group. Frost's imagery of the dividing of the path in a wood not only moved the person who had chosen to leave, but also offered others a chance to reflect on their own feelings of purpose and the possible choices that lay ahead. There was a strong sense of Alea in my alighting on this poem. I flicked through the book and it suggested itself to me.

However I can also see that I had made prior choices, which led to this moment. I knew and liked the poem, so it was more likely to catch my eye. At a practical level I had brought the anthology with me in anticipation that this group would be receptive to the reading of some poetry. I now aim to travel with more resources than I guess I may need – a sort of latent superfluity. I am reminded here of Wheatley's view, referenced in Chapter 3.

> **'In a living system, what is redundant? How can anyone know? Life doesn't pursue parsimony.' (Wheatley, 1996, 24)**

As for the journey home, I felt a pleasure at discovering a shared love of WB Yeats. This unexpected consequence of my having introduced poetry was striking. By the time we had finished our journey, we had talked through his life journey to date and where he wanted to go in the future. I knew that there was no way of engineering such conversations. It had grown organically from a process of shared improvisational play, which had started in the aesthetic environment of the group. I am left reflecting on the extent to which events may be designed to hold open more space, within and around them, to make it possible for such conversations to flourish. I also recognize that had he not experienced my readiness to listen to him, he would not have wanted to talk in this way. When we eventually got to his house, he insisted on my coming in for a cup of tea before I backtracked on my journey home.

Later I speculated on the boundary between action research and therapy. I am neither qualified to offer therapy, nor would I want to set myself up to do so. If there was any 'talking cure' in our relationship with each other, it happened in the car on the M25, in the recitation of Yeats and the conversation that this prompted.

I have had no further contact with this man. The work finished and we moved on down our two divergent roads. The moment now resides in our memories, to be drawn on imaginatively in whatever further sense-making may surface in our future lives.

On what grounds can I claim greater significance for such moments than for others in the memory stream of everyday life? Firstly as an expressive activity, albeit an informal one as we drove home, the poetry of WB Yeats offered a common reference, a recognition of a past aesthetic experience. This illustrates for me the importance of recognizing expressive activities as art, not therapy. WB Yeats was not to be used; his poetry surfaced out of our meeting. Secondly it was the action of sharing in this aesthetic process that re-contextualized our relationship in the moment. The fact that it was only brief and not subsequently continued does not diminish its significance for me.

Constructive processes

I now turn to the final of the three types of expressive process that I have chosen to inquire into – constructive processes.

This section could potentially contain a very wide range of examples, the common defining factor of which would be some level of creative activity, resulting in the construction of expressive statements or artefacts by individuals or groups. There is of course creativity in the evocative processes described in the previous section. So the distinguishing feature here is that there is some creative output, a drawing, a song, a play, a poem, a dance, a film, a model, a mask, something made – the list could be quite long.

From this range I have chosen two areas to illustrate and analyse – storytelling, an activity that is rooted in the poetic, and modelling which is a form of creative play. These are both within my experience as a facilitator. In doing so I shall draw attention to some of the theory that underpins narrative and symbolic inquiry.

Storytelling

Stories can be seen as a narrative and social dimension of the poetic. Barry (1997) places narrative alongside other models of inquiry into organizations but attributes to it the advantage that it,

> **'attends more to time, ordering, wording, consultant positioning, story performance, and audiencing, all of which are important in organizational change. (Barry, 1997, p. 3)**

The linear quality of storytelling in practice also creates a bridge between narrative writing and play, which in its mimetic form is built around story. In most social contexts, stories are the life-blood of communication, whether through news bulletins, novels, gossip, legal proceedings, preaching, stand-up comedy and obituaries. Stories are being generated around and within us constantly from birth to the grave. Shotter (1993) and Barrett (2000) both identify the creative improvisation that unfolds within dialogic exchanges between the teller and the listener. Stories beget stories.

Stories and strategy

Barry and Elmes (1997) describe the use of stories to re-tell strategy in an organization. The authors provide a definition of their understanding of narrative, as thematic, sequenced

accounts which convey meaning from implied author to implied reader. They pose the following questions,

> **'How do people make sense of and narrate their notions about directionality? When does a strategic story stay the same and when does it change? How does it survive "register" changes – alternating between the printed and the auditory, the formal and informal, or between intrafirm and industry levels?' (Barry and Elmes, 1997, p. 5)**

The issue of register change in my own practice has already been discussed, when, for example, I noted in Chapter 5, *What is my developing aesthetic in practice?*, how writing the story about an angioplasty offered different expressive opportunities, from talking about it face-to-face with consultants.

Organizational narratives, they argue, exhibit two fundamental qualities if they are to be influential; these are, credibility, and defamiliarization or novelty. The first, *credibility*, depends on the materiality of the story, both in terms of its delivery via print or other media as well as its figurative focus, either on tangible phenomena or on abstractions. Credibility depends on voice and perspective, – who speaks and who sees? It also depends on the ordering and plot – frequently built around the epic *Hero's Journey*, and finally on the readership since this inevitably influences the genre and style of the story. The second fundamental quality, *novelty* or *defamiliarization*, concerns the narrative's distinctiveness, or what holds the audience's attention.

These two qualities of credibility and novelty contribute to the sustaining of strategic stories through register shifts as they influence and are influenced by organisational life. Given this potency of spontaneous storytelling, how can it be used expressively as a conscious process in facilitation and cooperative inquiry? I now analyse two examples from my own practice.

Telling the group a story

The first story below was prompted by an incident, which occurred on my train journey to work with this group of managers. I had previously completed several days with the senior management team and now today they were joined by a larger group of middle managers. My experience so far was that the service was stressed and fractious as it struggled to reorganize and meet externally imposed performance standards. Here is my story,

journal ... The story of the oblivious flasher

'On my way here, standing on platform 1 of my hometown station at 7.30 am, along with several other hundred other passengers, I hear the following Public Address announcement:

"Will the man on Platform 2 with the flashing red light on his rucksack please switch it off."

Several hundred pairs of eyes scan the platform across two tracks and there he is, oblivious and flashing brightly, as he recovers from his bike ride to the station.

A more vehement announcement follows:

"For the second time of asking, will the man on Platform 2 with the flashing red light on his rucksack switch it off please!"

Suddenly it dawns on him that this is a personal message for him in a very public place. He turns away from the watching wall of faces and walks briskly up the platform struggling with his rucksack, extinguishing his bike lamp and looking upwards and into the middle distance.'

At a suitable moment in the earlier part of the workshop I looked round the group as they are completing a warm-up exercise in pairs. I reflected that some in the room were in dispute with the senior management team; some had worked here most of their lives and were resisting the restructuring; others saw it as a sensible rationalisation.

I decided somewhat impulsively to tell my story at this moment.

I now consider what lay behind this impulse. As the group had entered the room I experienced their mood as being uncomfortable. They were projecting a lot of banter and teasing which felt like a performance partly for my benefit as the person who was outside the group and perceived to be charged with the task of helping them resolve their difficulties. This mood was finding expression in a form of Agonistic play, a form of provocation to see what response it might get. In fact I avoided what I could see as a trap of starting the business before the whole group was fully assembled, simply acknowledging the jokes but getting on with my preparations.

Maybe the poetic import of the story had seeded itself in my mind, because I was also carrying anxiety about how best to work with this tension.

These thoughts were in my mind prior to my telling the story.

I also reflect on how the story was received. The story had some of what Barry and Elmes' describe as 'defamiliarization' about it. It made no direct reference to their work setting. It presented itself as an example of a traveller's tale – 'a funny thing happened to me on my way to the workshop'. It also had a credibility about it, being the sort of incident that might crop up anywhere, including in a bad dream.

I judged that this was a safer imaginary place in which to acknowledge anger and fear of exposure or public humiliation, than to play such emotions out for real. The flashing light image was absorbed into subsequent narratives as the day progressed, in a process, which lightly acknowledged areas that people needed to work on.

Storytelling by participants

Another expressive method that I have used is a device called story circles, a way of facilitating story telling that provides a simple structure for managing this group process. This method has been widely used in participative action research in the US and elsewhere, (**Denver Making Connections - Story circles, 2006**). Its purpose is to create a reflective group in which those who wish, may tell a story on an agreed theme for a specified time of no more than three minutes. Those who do not wish to speak simply 'pass', but are invited to tell their story on a second time round if they wish. At this stage no questions or comments are invited; this focuses attention on listening to each story. People are asked to suppress the urge to compete by trying to invent 'the best story'. If they were to do this they would probably be unable to listen well to others. The exercise concludes with an appreciative round of comments on verbal images in stories, that have made an impact.

I have included this activity in a session I ran at an international conference. The purpose of this forty minute session was to help the small participant group of academics explore briefly how their experience of arriving in a foreign city impacted on participation in a conference session such as this. I described the session as an example of a temporary learning event and expected that many or all of those who chose to come would share my interest in reflecting on the aesthetic of such events and the influence this has on the learning that occurs.

At the beginning of the session, the group of eight people who turned up were invited to take part in a short silent reflective period as we absorbed the sounds and visual data of sitting together in the unfamiliar setting of these university buildings.

Then I introduced the rules for story circles and invited participants to tell the story of what was uppermost in their experience of arriving. All bar one person told a three-minute story. Some spoke of choices they had made about leaving their families behind to attend the conference; others spoke about the sense of being in central Europe and their curiosity about its history and traces of the former Communist regime. One person who had a role in organizing the conference spoke of his dread of arriving and fear of what might go wrong in so complicated a project. He noticed how in the midst of an event which was running smoothly, most of his anxieties had slipped away, as he experienced being here with actual people, not lists of names.

I had bought a set of post cards of the city and had planned that people should write down a short image that had captured their imaginal eye them during this reflection. However, as time was running short, I suggested that they might like to send the card for real or keep it as a memento. (I now speculate whether some of these arrived at addresses across the world and became a small artefact which might later re-surface in a facilitator's resource collection, where it would find a new aesthetic life in different hands!)

As with many conference sessions it was too brief (40 minutes) for us to experience much social cohesion. I had no idea who would attend or in what number, until the moment of their arrival. I make no claims for its effectiveness on behalf of the participants, although they did express appreciation by clapping at the end of the session. For me as facilitator I was able to practise, against these odds, working in-the-moment with the aesthetic we were experiencing. I offered no more than a minimal framework for this short activity. I received feedback that my way of holding the space and sequencing of the event modelled the level of reflexivity which I was hoping that we might experience. I took from this the importance of authenticity and belief in what I was inviting the group to participate in. I also see again the value of trusting in simple aesthetic frameworks to release a type and depth of inquiry which helps people process memories, feelings and concepts in an imaginative way.

Story writing

Winter, Buck and Sobiechowska (1999) describe how health and social care professionals were helped to write stories as a form of reflective process.

Winter and his colleagues claim that a story is,

> **'a piece of writing where the raw material of memory and imagination has been purposefully fashioned, moulded, selected, combined and edited, to give (or bring out) a sense of significance.'(Winter, Buck and Sobiechowska, 1999, p. 7)**

Using story writing, participants found a way of reflecting, which enabled them imaginatively to re-construct the meanings they found in their work. I have been involved in a similar process throughout this inquiry.

Wilkinson (1998) has collected a number of activities through which this framing of stories can be further developed. I recently used a warm-up exercise from her anthology of methods. I started by asking people to invent the first line of their autobiography and write it down. I then invited people to volunteer to read out their sentence. The first person read out, "Variety is the spice of life ...". I later noted in my journal how this activity continued,

Journal ... **Story warm-up**

Journal	**Commentary**
'The activity then stalled a bit in the large group. The invitation was too public, so I suggested they try the sentences out on each other which released this inhibition. One or two people repeated their sentences to the whole group.	I notice the steps towards safety in disclosing this sort of material still need to be carefully constructed for the group. I had to retreat a step to make this work.
'It wasn't until my ex-husband left that I ...' The rest of the sentence was lost in laughter.	This witty rising to the storytelling challenge elicited a strong sense of empathy in the mainly female group.
Or 'On the first Christmas that I can remember, I got tipsy; I was three at the time ...' More laughter, as the speaker explained how she had filched her father's glass of wine.'	There was a playful sense of telling tales out of school, but at the teller's own expense.

Wilkinson's activities are designed to encourage the use of creative writing with groups. Another that I have used invites participants to imagine a photo of themselves at work. As facilitator I asked a series of prompting questions to which participants then wrote answers. These included questions about the setting of the imagined picture, who was in, who not, what they were doing and where, and so on. They were then invited to discuss their written 'photo' in small groups, commenting on how it made them feel and think about their work. These exercises overcome some of the resistance that people may feel in putting pen to paper.

In introducing the use of reflective writing with groups I have adopted a playful approach, such as the game of fridge magnet poems. In this, small groups are given several hundred words and phrases from which to construct a fifteen word statement on their hopes for the future of the unit or team. This is another example of the coming together of the Alea of play, in the random dealing of words, and the poetic as people strive to fashion sometimes remarkable aesthetic statements.

I see storytelling as a natural bridge between intrinsic and expressive aesthetics in groups. As the reference to story circles above makes clear, it takes quite light and minimal re-framings to enable people to work imaginatively through stories.

Modelling

The use of visual symbols offers an alternative or a complement to accessing meaning through the symbolism of spoken language. Referencing Johnson-Laird and Steedman, (1978), Barry points to some of the underlying processes of symbolically-based reasoning, which occur in this model-making.

> **'From a cognitive point of view, research suggests that symbolically-based reasoning has several attributes that make it well suited to problem solving – symbolic analogs allow manipulation of naturally occurring mental images, 'safe' testing of alternative solutions, and promote creativity through introducing structural juxtapositioning of disparate lines of thought.' (Barry 1994, p. 2)**

I have included in Chapter 2, *The inquiring 'I'*, an example of a visual activity in the drawing by 18 co-participants of each other's faces. I have subsequently used this activity in several other groups. It reduces to a minimum any anxiety people may have about drawing, as

everyone does it simultaneously and there is less exposure for those who may feel insecure about the capacity to work in this way.

I now describe a session involving the use of model-making that I ran with the group of education service managers, the same group to whom I had already told the story described earlier in this chapter.

Journal ... Model-making as a means of inquiry

Journal

Asking the group of managers to produce a model of how they saw themselves working as the policy group of the service, I distributed the materials. Four groups of three or four people engaged playfully with the task, some sitting on the floor.

...

When later we discussed the models, I left the most complex till last. So we looked first at a construction of two cocoa tins with a piece of string stretched between them as a crude communications system. I set the rule that the group who had made each model would firstly listen to what it meant to the rest of us, before offering their own comments. One person said, "Well at least they think there is some form of communication between us." The silent implicative double[1] around this comment acknowledged the sense of disconnection many were experiencing. Others drew attention to the fact that two small

Commentary

Some of these models represented a rhetorical 'swipe' at the perceived state of the group. They each focused on one dimension such as communication or preparedness for disclosure of what was thought to be amiss, a theme that had been raised in my introductory story.

[1] I explore this concept of negativity or the lacuna that surrounds words more fully in Chapter 11, *The poetics in practice*.

figures depicted below, were holding hands but looking away from each other.

Another group produced a mural of a line of washing, with black clouds overhead but also with a few hesitant stars.

A third represented a block of a house with a foil roof, but when the two pieces of string emanating from the side walls were pulled, it all fell apart.

This falling house was the most despairing symbol. I might have asked who was pulling the string that caused the collapse, but felt that this would have taken us too directly into confrontational territory at this early stage in the day.

Then we turned to the last group which included amongst others, the union rep and the head of service. They had made an elaborate river in torrent with a string tightrope over it. A floppy tiny figure of string was lying bent double over the mid-point of it. A tangerine featured as a desirable goody on the other bank of the river, but it too was vulnerable, tied as it was to a string lasso.

This last model took the most time to produce. There was much discussion about its significance as it was put together. This seemed to be the 'hotspot' where senior and middle management met and negotiated how to make their symbolic statement.

I asked the group to look at the images and models and let them speak to their concerns about the group. I warned against pop-psychology, urging them to simply take the constructions as they were, as statements about the way the group had been.

Using these models as a springboard I then moved on to an open space exploration of what it was

I reflect now on why I switched modes here and moved back to discussion.

that would make the greatest difference in giving more security, better communications, a better house that wouldn't fall down, one where you could hang out your washing with pride, without falling into the torrent!

I noticed some engaging in small groups with an energy and a concentration that I had not seen earlier.'

The need for reconstruction was clearly evident to me. With hindsight I might have suggested a second round of model-making to reassemble these broken images. This may have helped the group stay at this symbolic level as they looked towards a more cohesive future.

With regard to the last piece of commentary, this reflection may mark the stage I was at in trusting the potentiality of this expressive process to support the group's inquiry needs. I reasoned that there would need to be a point where we switched from symbolic representation of the group's performance and relationships, to dialogue about what might need to change. This began to happen in the subsequent small group discussions, but I would now have suggested some further modelling of the group's desired future.

Perhaps the measure of the quality of engagement that this sort of activity can generate can be found in the wrapped attention and ingenuity that goes into the modelling. Barry (1994) comments on this quality in his case study with military staff,

> **'Over the next few hours, activity levels rose to a feverish pitch as participants began to revel in their creations. Much to the surprise of the commanding group, officers who had avoided one another for years were seen slapping one another on the backs, sharing materials and ideas, and joking with one another. The commanding officer commented, "I can't believe this is happening—these are people that won't come to the same meeting unless given a direct order." ' (Barry 1994, p. 39)**

Barry asserts the importance of focusing on what the artefact has to say in any subsequent group discussion,

> **'In the work that followed, participants were asked to engage in detailed questioning of their creations. They were to assume that every inch of their creations had some message, some meaning that was waiting to be revealed. Thus, things like color difference, massing,**

> **use of space, supportive structures, use of boundaries etc., became vehicles of inquiry.'**
> **(Ibid., 1994, p. 3)**

This again reinforces for me the importance of valuing in its own right what is produced. Imagination was put into the model; it is this that needs to be given space to speak out of the model.

Photography

I have begun to use photographic images taken in and around organizations as prompts to reflection when working with groups. The theoretical rationale for working with visual imagery as part of my research methodology was presented in Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*. There I referred to Pink (2001) and her work on visual ethnography, in the course of describing my own inquiry method. In particular, with MacDougall (1997), I do not see this type of activity as being illustrative of some other propositional agenda of verbal inquiry. Rather I have come to see that it has its own validity within action research, as a reflexive and evocative process that complements and sometimes renders redundant other textual processes.

I briefly reference below the uses of photographic and image-making, which are included throughout this thesis.

Photos and drawings were used in Chapter 2, *The inquiring 'I'*, as part of an imaginal exploration of what it is that has brought me to this present point of inquiry. Photos were used, in Chapter 3, as a point of entry into a propositional inquiry about the theoretical framework within which I now work. In Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*, I included a selection of still pictures taken in Silver Street and offered an analytic commentary on how they added to my experience of this community.

An analysis of the photograph of Lorraine and Kuldip in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*, referenced the work of the video artist, Bill Viola. There I explored how the photographic image added to my insights into this relational moment. Also in Chapter 13, *The news of difference in Silver Street-3* I will show how people made their own photographic and video record of their inquiry into finding work opportunities. For this group of people with learning difficulties it became an essential means of capturing material about themselves in the context of their inquiry.

This form of visual ethnography came to me comparatively late in this inquiry, but I anticipate working increasingly in the future in this way, alongside writing, as my main inquiry methods.

Conclusion

In considering the use of a range of expressive activities I firstly recognized two inquiry questions that I needed to address. The first concerned how to place such activities in relation to other forms of art making. By reference to Winter (1999), they were shown to be part of a spectrum of creativity which extends beyond them to include 'high art'. The second question concerned the relationship between different aesthetics in groups. The facilitator's *presence* is experienced by others as an expression of her or his aesthetic; but the aesthetic *presence* of all participants is also very influential. Choices about introducing expressive activities need to be made with an awareness of the intrinsic aesthetic relationships in the group, as people perceive each other acting and talking.

I suggested that expressive processes may be thought of in three categories,

- embodied and kinaesthetic
- evocative
- constructive processes.

In the first section on embodied and kinaesthetic processes, I described how the selection of venue, food and environment of inquiry events can be seen as an expressive act, which frames the quality of the interaction.

Then I considered evocative activities where people respond to objects selected for their significance to individuals in the group. I also analysed a journal entry about the use of poetry within and after a session. I explored the question of boundary, in doing so, between expressive activities and therapy.

In the section on constructive processes I featured storytelling, model making and photography. Storytelling was shown to be deeply rooted within all human communication. I described my own use storytelling with a group of education service managers who were trying to work with the consequences of change. In a second example, I described using a technique called story circles within a session I facilitated at an academic conference. I also illustrated briefly ways in which storytelling ties in with writing as an inquiry method.

I then considered the use of model-making, in an example drawn from my journal of the continuing session with education service managers. Barry's (1994) work on symbolic representation was referenced in the commentary on this activity.

I commented on photography, which is a new and burgeoning area of my methodology. In referencing Pink, (2001), I described the visual as a reflexive and evocative process that complements and sometimes renders redundant other processes such as text. I also listed those places in the thesis where examples of this way of working may be found.

A significant final point about expressive work arises for me in summing up this chapter. Reviewing the examples I have analysed, I notice how the choices that I can make as a facilitator are always framed and contextualised by the intrinsic aesthetic of the moment. When, where, with whom and how expressive activities work is contextual – for them, for me, on that day, in that moment. In facilitating activities I have to play within this context, by improvising the best match between the moment and the purpose. There are no formulae which will guarantee replicable outcomes from expressive activities. Their use in itself is a form of aesthetic process and depends on the attunement and skill of the facilitator and the energy and creativity of the group coming together, in what Bateson would call mind.

There follows a short interlude connecting Part B to Part C.

Interlude – Part B to Part C

In Part B I described the first stage of my connection with Silver Street in a dual role as a volunteer and a researcher; this resulted in a period of intense first person inquiry into my relating to this new community.

By the conclusion of this first stage I had explored the interaction between my own developing aesthetic in practice and that of the individuals and groups with whom I was engaging. I had also opened up an inquiry into the intrinsic and expressive aesthetics in practice. The analysis of episodes from Silver Street-1 and elsewhere showed how the expressive aesthetic of arts-based processes are always enacted within an intrinsic aesthetic context. This calls for a greater sense of contingency between the two, on the part of myself as facilitator.

My choice of a phenomenological framework was increasingly confirmed as I looked at the personal meanings that greater openness to this participation elicited. I found myself living more in the moment of experiencing both intrinsic and expressive aesthetics. Once experience is expressed in aesthetic statements, performance or artefacts, it has the power to influence and change others through their imaginal participation in stories, observations and reflections.

Now in Part C I will describe and analyse my first experience of a sustained action research inquiry; this was with a group of Silver Street front-line staff and it focused on the issue of making the service provided for people with learning disabilities more flexibly tailored to their individual needs. As my account will show, I found myself learning 'on-line' about the tension between hierarchy, cooperation and autonomy which Heron and Reason see as the enabling balance within and between people in such inquiries.

Play was evident in the subtle interactional unfolding of sessions as we attended to what it felt like to be acting together and experiencing the dramatic shaping and dénouement of events. I became more attuned to the movements of thoughts and feelings in the aesthetic of the group, and to the group's capacity to work in its own play modes of Agon, Alea, Mimesis and Ilynx.

Also within this playful environment we created dialogue that enhanced the reflexive processing of shared experience. I came to see this as a poetic process; it was evident in our

working more consciously with narrative, imagery and metaphor, that people were able to re-tell their stories and evocatively engage with the stories of others.

In analysing the journal accounts of this period, I began to see more clearly how play and poetics are intertwined processes. Understanding this led to my closer attunement to the aesthetic improvisations of dialogue and drama in group interactions and encouraged me to use expressive activities which render themselves more open to aesthetic knowing.

I have structured my account of this stage in my work in the following way.

Chapter 9, Action research in Silver Street-2
This first chapter introduces the *Different Days* cooperative inquiry and analyses the first two days, both for what they said about action research as an approach, as well as the opening tendency to playfulness and poetry that we experienced. An early question from a participant, "What do you want us to do?" intimated a tension they were experiencing around my wish to work with the group in a more participative way.

I describe the way expressive activities engaged the group and began to open up a greater sense of voice and cohesion.

Chapter 10, Play in practice
Having already analysed practice accounts from a play perspective earlier in the thesis, I now take the opportunity to focus on the theoretical framework for play as an aesthetic process. Drawing on the work of Huizinga, (1938) and Caillois, (1958), I explore the relevance to an analysis of Silver Street-2, of four 'dispositions' – Agon, Alea, Mimesis and Ilynx,. In particular I make sense of a moment when a participant posed the question, "Where is all this getting us?"

Chapter 11, Poetics in practice
Here I define how I am using the term *poetics in practice*. It encompass all those processes of shaping imagination in groups, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols.

Referencing Linstead, (2000) and others I explore the concept of negativity or the silent implicative double and apply it to an account of a conversation I had with *Tony*, who attends the Centre. The concept of metaphor in relation to practice is explored by reference to Lakoff and Johnson, (1980).

I conclude this chapter by presenting and analysing an item of my expressive writing as a form of poetic inquiry into practice. It is based on the Tony journal item referred to above.

Chapter 12, Silver Street-2, Where has all this got us?

This final short chapter returns to Silver Street-2 and shows some of the main directions in which this cooperative inquiry did 'get us'. This account provides me with an opportunity to reflect on the use of model making as an expressive process. In this case it enabled the group to articulate their vision of a future service that would be more community-based and responsive to individual needs.

Part C

ACTION RESEARCH, PLAY AND POETICS

Chapter 9, Action Research in Silver Street-2

9 Action research in Silver Street-2

Introduction

The inquiry into the aesthetic of Silver Street, so far described in Parts A and B, now takes on a different turn. Much of my reflection till now may be described as first person inquiry. Although this personal reflective voice will continue through to the end of the thesis, in parallel I now bring other voices into the narrative in the form of second person inquiry. In this chapter I describe my first piece of action research in Silver Street. Its purpose was to find ways of making service users' experience more person-centred through flexible and varied offers of activities, – that is, more like the normal life that most people enjoy.

The function of my continuing first person inquiry was to learn more about the aesthetic in this new way of working and assess how a heightened awareness of it contributed to my practice.

In this chapter I aim to,

- describe the first two days of my facilitating this action research with front-line staff
- analyse the experience and reflect on the issues it raised
- feature the ways my developing focus on the aesthetic in practice influenced how I worked.

The context of this cooperative inquiry

The day opportunities service had chosen to launch its version of the Government's *Valuing People* initiative, under the general title, *Different Days*. Its intention was to reduce a dependency on the pattern of mini-bus delivery and collection of people to spend five days a week in the Centre throughout 51 weeks a year. *Different Days* would involve developing more flexible support to enable people to lead fuller lives.

Presenting it under this title can be seen as an expressive manifestation of the corporate aesthetics of Silver Street. Carter and Jackson (2000) identify two main elements to organizational aesthetics; they argue,

> **'First, that in producing an aesthetic what an organization does, intentionally and/or unintentionally, is to structure both form and content in such a way as to elicit a positive**

> **response from all those with whom it has any transactions. Secondly, that the way that this is done generally involves a profound denial of the reality of the organization(s).' (Carter and Jackson, 2000, p. 189)**

The term *Different Days*, I was later to discover, was regarded as in some ways alien to staff. Although there was clearly a strong aspirational intention on the part of managers in choosing this name, the initiative might be seen by some stakeholders as a form of anaesthetic or denial of the reality of the actual day-to-service that they knew.
I therefore approached the project holding in mind the likelihood that the group might have framed the initiative in this way. My hope was that we could, through collaborative inquiry, re-story and re-enact aspects of their professional practice, without ourselves contributing to some form of denial. This would mean accepting the pace and depth of inquiry that we as a group were capable of, rather than aim to meet externally set objectives at any cost.

McKnight (1995) problematizes the commoditization of care through state funded service delivery and contrasts this with the care that families and communities offer spontaneously in some cultures. The staff in Silver Street bridge both worlds. Several have family members who attend the Centre, including the manager whose brother has profound physical and mental disabilities. Richard, the Centre's caretaker-cum-general factotum, has a sister with learning disabilities living at home. A staff member, Ian, told me how he had grown up with a school friend who, following brain damage as a boy through a medical accident, was now in Ian's Silver Street unit suffering from profound degenerative disabilities. I later discovered that this was one of the sons of the person whom we were to meet on a visit to the local MENCAP branch.

So there is a close family network between some staff and the people for whom they provide a service. Although it is tempting to see this as a form of hybrid between McNight's commoditized state care and community or family care, the overall ethos of day centres still currently feels to be that of a statutory service. The *Different Days* project was part of an initiative to square this circle so that service users regain some of the independence and choice that more person centred programmes might offer. I was conscious though of working between the organizational an-aesthetic of this change initiative and people's individual experience derived from day-to-day service delivery.

I therefore determined from the start that I should work on this project *with* rather than *for* those close to the front-line of service provision. I sensed a strong awareness of alignment between my commitment to a participative action research approach and the equally

participative striving to involve people with learning disabilities within the planning and development of their own more independent living. Although we would be working within the framing of the *Valuing People* policy for people with learning disabilities, the inquiry had to focus on developing local community meanings and values in day-to-day participative practice.

Silver Street-2, an action research project

It had been agreed that I should facilitate a programme of five one-day events on the theme of *Different Frontline Days*. I had extensive discussions with the Centre manager and explained that I would be using a collaborative approach with staff to inquire into what offering a more flexible service would mean for them and for the Centre. She was very supportive and the fact that I had already established a relationship with the Centre through my volunteering there eased the pathway.

I produced a one-page programme, outlining the following objectives,

The programme will enable you to:

- **re-examine assumptions and values about independence, choice and inclusion for people with learning disabilities**
- **learn from reflection on current practice**
- **develop a person-centred practice that better meets people's needs.**

Prior to the start I prepared and circulated the written invitation; a copy is shown overleaf.

'Different ways of working together

This is my invitation to you to find different ways of working together during this programme.

Using your experience and expertise

Within this group there is considerable accumulated experience and expertise in working with people with learning disabilities. Each of you brings your own unique understanding of this. I hope we can set up a way of working where this is valued and recognised. My role is to facilitate this process.

Planning the programme together

Although I have mapped out the overall direction of the programme, I would like to involve you in planning what we do week by week and how we do it.

It is up to everyone to develop 'different days' for and with service users, so that it seems appropriate that we should also be finding a different way of working together. To make space for this I suggest we set aside time during each day to do any necessary review and planning to keep us on target.

Involvement of service users

The voice of service users needs to be heard either in person at stages within the programme and/or through your advocacy for them.

We need to talk through how this might work; what ideas do you have?

Recording what we learn

We need to capture good ideas and messages to share with others not on the programme. This may involve using our skills in writing, drawing, painting, taking photos, video, etc. I shall be writing and taking some pictures as we go along. This is an invitation to anyone in the group to contribute your own material.'

This written statement contained the most important elements of difference in ways of working which I hoped would become part of our shared practice. It was appreciative of the

quality of much of their work. I had also tried to prepare the ground for this aspiration to work in different ways together.

Nevertheless reading this note again with the hindsight of more practice experience, I would choose to do things differently now. I would explore in a face-to-face dialogue how we might work together. I can see that the particular rhetorical stance of my note might for some have raised rather than lowered anxieties about what they had been asked to participate in. I take from this a greater sense of responsibility to follow aesthetic pathways, which are congruent with those of the people in the group, particularly in the early stages of cooperative learning about each other. Face-to-face connection has the spontaneity and flexibility of play; it provides the opportunity for an on-line interactive shaping of dialogue, which cannot occur in text. This observation contributes to the theme in this thesis concerning the congruence between the choice of forms and the intrinsic aesthetic of the moment. This moment called for a seriously playful dialogue.

Week 1

I now describe below the beginnings of a working relationship between us during Week 1.

journal ... Beginning to connect, 11/5/2004

Journal	Commentary
We assembled in the Irish Centre for Day 1. This former secondary school has seen better days. But what it lacks in investment and maintenance it makes up for in the friendliness of the centre staff. I look down on a nursery playground and across to a new housing estate, where I am later told, Victoria Climbie suffered such an appalling end to a short life.	I often have a strong sense of occasion at these moments, which I can only compare with my previous experience of waiting to go on stage, when for a period of two years I regularly did this. Not to say that I confuse facilitation with acting; rather they both have in common for me, a curious mix of slightly painful expectation and adrenalin rush, and a calm, quiet sense of anticipatory pleasure and well-being.
One by one people arrive and we begin. We review the programme as a whole and I talk through the written invitation to regard this as a different way of learning.	

I compared my brief experience of learning disabilities with theirs, which in some cases ran for well over a decade. I explained that I was not therefore coming to this programme as an expert in their profession; rather I was bringing my insights into how we can learn better together.

We discussed how we might involve service users. ....
People with profound disability and often physical disability are based at the main Silver Street building. Some are non-verbal or choose not to speak. We decided that it would not show respect to them to invite them to join us. We did however discuss how their views and voice might be heard in our reflections on practice. (See later for a reference to the activity that we set up to be completed between Week 1 and Week 2.)

Those people with moderate learning disabilities who meet in satellites of Silver Street, present a different opportunity for participation. It may be that we can invite some of them to join us later. Indeed several of those who work in the 'Green Peppers' café nearby did arrive at midday with our buffet lunch. Glenn hurried round the room shaking hands with everyone. This seemed a fleeting but natural piece of connection.

As I read again this treatment of the issue of service user participation, I feel that I am skating on thin ice. If action research is to involve the whole community to whom the issue belongs, service users should have been there.

In making a distinction though between profound and moderate disability, we were recognizing the unacceptability of trying to 'impose' participation on profoundly disabled people for whom our activities together would have made little or no sense. Also their physical needs could not have been met in this building.

The case is different for people with less profound disabilities. Although for this project we worked as a staff group, with the focus and space that this provided, in the final of the three Silver Street projects, which I describe in Part D, staff and service users were both fully involved.

On the topic of recording I urged people to think of ways of visualising as well as writing material. I had brought along some basic art materials to help make this possible. I have in mind that they may compile sufficient records in their folders that we may have something to offer as evidence of what has been achieved. It'll be interesting to see this coming Tuesday if anyone takes up my suggestion of using other than text to illustrate a short case study of a user. My reason for encouraging these forms of expression is that by breaking out of the conventions of spoken and written language, other equally valid meanings may be defined and refined in the group.

Another of my hopes was that their gathering or creating visual or audio material might lower any barriers individuals had about writing, and in fact I was to discover that writing did not come easily to some people in the group.

The invitation to work with other media did not, however, bear fruit until later in the programme, when some people compiled examples of ways of communicating visually with non-verbal service users. Participants responded positively though to expressive activities in our own sessions together, as the post card activity described below shows.

I can hear how in the left-hand column I am writing with more than half an ear turned towards my audience of participants; I am advancing my rationale for arts-based expression as if this would convince participants, – too easy an assumption.

What I learned from this was that the active introduction of expressive processes needs to be handled more sensitively and only in pursuit of the needs of the group's inquiry. There should be a period of induction when people can gain confidence by working together with a choice of different forms of representation. I would now try to judge how congruent such activities were to the intrinsic aesthetic of a group, before offering them. It is a basic principle of play, – I take these activities to be a heuristic and creative form of play – that it only becomes play when voluntarily entered into.

'What do you want us to do?'

As the morning progressed, I begin to tune into the sense of unfolding play in this initial process of relationship building.

A participant called Beverley, who is new to me, challenged me to recognize that the management's motivation for providing this programme might be more to do with placating workers in an endeavour to make the Centre's action plan stick. She hedged her parries around with a fleeting apology for making things difficult for me. She did so in a lightly flirtatious way, wrapped around by an assumption that she could win me over to some form of collusion with what she was about to say. I wondered in the moment how to interpret and respond to this play. I experienced it on reflection as a testing out of my position, with an element of manipulation, a way of trying to marginalize my authority within their system.

In fact I felt well prepared to respond to it, because I did not want to draw on the referred authority of the system, but my own authority as a person entering it and wanting to learn with them.

Behind the energy and flirtatiousness in this encounter, I was aware of the stresses of the organization coming through.

Journal

I explained to the group that I was trying to set as few of the rules as possible. "What do you want us to do?" Beverley asked me about the next activity. I restated its agreed purpose and returned the question by asking her and the group how they wanted to respond.

Picture yourself

We explored people's expectations of the programme by using picture post cards. I had brought in fifty or so cards and people worked in small groups, choosing a card, which expressed how they were feeling about participating.

Commentary

This note probably makes the exchange sound more brusque than I remember it being. It does though show the tricky balance in a more participative form of facilitation between providing necessary structures and conventions and not reducing people's sense of ownership of learning.

I earlier referenced in Chapter 3 Heron's (1989) succinct coverage of this issue as, **'deciding for others, with others and for oneself.'**

A postcard picture of a park prompted a comment about the wish for greater contact with the community. A picture of food – "We make the choices of what they will eat. I like to get up and decide what I'll eat each day. We don't allow them that."

Lucy chose a Caribbean clapperboard house in bright sunshine and then noticed it was a church. "We should give them more culture, more religion." We talked about what that might mean. Another card of a group of men manoeuvring a statue in a park suggested 'co-ordination', working together. A series of pictures of stages in the building of the Eiffel Tower prompted a reference to the fact that the service was in transition.

I was asked why I hadn't selected one. I found a painting of three standing women, their faces not painted in. I said that I liked the prevailing blue and the mystery of the painting; like the group I hoped that we would learn a lot more about each other – that we would acquire faces.

This challenge made me aware that I was still hovering somewhat uneasily between being 'directing' and 'participating'.

I now think it is not necessary that I as a facilitator have to participate in every activity. In fact doing so could be a disincentive to others, if my way of doing it unintentionally becomes the model for how it should be done.

Mapping out directions

We moved on to consider the Centre's published *Different Days* Action Plan, as this was the formal initiative that framed our co-inquiry. By way of preparation I had asked for a copy of this document to be provided for each participant in the project. We also looked at the executive summary of the government's white paper, *Valuing People*, that I had copied for them.

I asked people to spend twenty minutes in pairs familiarizing themselves with both documents. As I watched them, I realized that this was not something that motivated them greatly. Perhaps they already were overly familiar with them. Somehow I doubted this though. A discussion followed.

Journal	Commentary
Much of the discussion around these papers took us back to questions of authority and legitimacy. "Whose plan?", "No new money", "Why weren't we involved earlier?" I found myself not wanting to slip into the role of defending the intentions of those outside the room. I simply said that there seemed to my eye to be many things in these documents that we would want to see happen. I couldn't comment on the process of planning because I did not know how it had happened. It is really useful sometimes not knowing too much!	This felt like familiar ground; I was glad that this alienation had surfaced so early and that I felt confident in declaring where I stood in relation to it. It was not my issue, but I recognized that it was theirs, at least for the time being.

Time-line activity

I sensed that this group needed more time to connect with each other and to be recognized for the quality of work and commitment to individual service users that was beginning to be evident in the group. We engaged in a time-line exercise. I had prepared A4 sheets with a framework which invited people to think back over the last ten years and plot significant stages in their own lives and relate these to events that they could recall from the national or international arena. Along the centre of the landscape format page was a line which invited them to add notes on their personal history of working with people with learning disabilities,

particularly with regard to steps they had experienced in creating a more flexible and user focused service. This prompted a lot of animated discussion in small groups as people learned more about each other's families and personal histories in Silver Street and elsewhere.

We transferred details from these sheets to a large wall display of flipchart paper and again as people decided what to 'publish' in this way there was a buzz of energy. I allowed the activity to run for quite a time as I intuitively felt that it was what the group needed more of.

What the time-line activity taught me

This expressive activity had about it qualities that I was beginning to find in other activities such as *story circles*, to which I referred in the previous chapter. I could summarize these qualities as follows.

- They made minimum demands on individual's reflexive capacity at a stage when they were not yet ready for more sustained and shared inquiry.
- They offered a light but enabling framework, in this case the A4 form and the wall chart.
- They encouraged a fluid and easy mix of brief writing and speaking.
- They offered a multi-voiced and cooperative way of expressing where the group was at this moment, as they assembled their material on the wall.

Humour and play

In the afternoon we thought through the programme objectives together and started some collaborative planning for the next couple of weeks.

We concluded the day by agreeing that we would each do a short study of one service user. I asked what they thought it would be useful to include in such a study. The group drew up a simple brief. I urged them to be adventurous in how they recorded what they observed.

I want now to feature a moment in Day 1 for the light it throws on the intrinsic play that was to be threaded through the following weeks.

Journal

Towards the end of the day, Beverley said in a whole group final session, "So – we're going to meet up again next week, are we, Alan?" To which I replied, tongue in cheek, "You make it sound like an assignation." A voice from elsewhere in the room said, "There, that showed you, Beverley." I thought that the group was beginning to find itself in relation to each other and me. No doubt there will be more exploratory forays next week.

Commentary

This encounter with Beverley had for a moment become a spontaneous piece of theatre, her dialogue with me turning the rest of the group into spectators, their attention focused on an unexpected outcome. Brief though the exchange was, its playfulness was only possible because we both knew that in some sense it was not for real. Her question was cued by its introductory 'So' as a marker to all of us that what would follow was a bit of a tease. The rest of her question contained an implicit collusion which I chose in the moment to surface by reference to an assignation.

What this taught me about humour and play

Read cold on the page, this micro encounter might still seem to leave many questions unanswered. What is lost in my attempt to analyse it so far, is the sense of playfulness and laughter which maintained us in the level and quality of relating that I judged would be constructive. For this encounter to become play, we had to live intuitively in the moment. For it to remain play there needed to be a level of trust. I had to believe that I could relate to her whilst recognizing the theatricality of the enticement and she equally needed to know that I was open to enjoying this playful but innocent connection.

I am aware that humour is a conspicuous part of my way of creating relationships. When humour occurs spontaneously in the moment, laughter and a changed flow of dialogue provide instantaneous feedback. I have tried to work out how I sense when humour in practice is well managed or not. In my list of evidence, I would include:

- *Non-verbal*

  Evidence of a mutual perception and mirroring of posture, gesture and proximity – when I feel we are warming to each other.
- *Dialogic*

  Evidence of increased capacity to handle ambiguity and irony; this often finds verbal expression in the words that prompt the laughter, such as 'assignation' in this example.

- *Intentional*

  Acceptance that the humour in whatever makes us laugh or smile together, is intended positively.

- *Relational*

  A recognition of affinity with and increased trust in the other.

(A buoyant good humour was to develop in the group. When Navado had swung so nonchalantly far back on his chair that it collapsed into firewood beneath him, we laughed a lot, – having seen that he had with some agility saved himself from injury. This was the stuff of slapstick comedy.)

A general sense of wellbeing was often to pervade the room over the coming weeks. We listened to Miles Davis' 'A Kind of Blue' and other music volunteered by members of the group, whilst eating excellent sandwiches delivered each day from the *Green Peppers* cafe.

Week 2

I now move on to describe the way this inquiry developed in Week 2.

journal ... They are not doing what I hoped! 18/5/2004

Journal	Commentary
I arrived with a bunch of flowers I had picked from our garden, this in response to the drab circumstances we will be working in. It is already unseasonably hot and as the day progressed, our room became stuffy, despite our opening all the windows.	
I am also carrying some anxiety on arrival, about the demands of our programme that in Week 3 we would be meeting managers and going out in the afternoon to community venues which as yet we had not identified.	I recall feeling a sense of physical anxiety, as I locked the car door and struggled with the flowers, my case and a box of materials up the stairs.

I am feeling a tension between this experience of democratic practice and my former modes of running events.

As a warm-up and a way of re-connecting we start by sharing a few stories of what we have been during the week.

Last week we had agreed to do a small study of individual service users to identify something about their likes and dislikes with a view to finding changes which would make a difference for them.

I decided that it will be a very long process to hear about each person's study in the whole group. There are eleven people today as Ian has joined the programme this week, his having been last week on a tall ship sailing across the Channel with disabled people.

I divide them into two sub-groups. As I do so, Navado says, "How will you know what we have done?" I say that it is more important that people listen attentively to others' stories, than that I should hear them all, but I'll eavesdrop on each group. I wonder again how far this line of not claiming the role of hub and the arbiter of discussion in the group is realistic or helpful for them. This is compounded by my growing sense of the group's low self-confidence and energy today.

I have learned that in these situations I have to notice what my body is telling me, through increased pulse, heartbeat and stomach. This is a time to pause for breath to look from a staircase landing out across the view and be calm for a moment.

Possibly I should have found a way of sampling some or all of the stories in the large group. Navado's intervention was saying that they needed me to hear, and by inference, approve.

I chose otherwise, trying to avoid this teacherly role and they found this odd and did not play.

The best part of the day involved a complete switch of activity and medium. Before and after lunch we saw a video called *Road Trip* that I had come across. It was made by a performing arts project in South London, called Heart'nSoul. This project is run with the active participation of its client group – people with learning disabilities. I had seen the programme on Channel 4 earlier in the year and traced the makers through the C4 website. It depicts a group of people with learning disabilities on a tour by double-decker bus round Britain, including, by coincidence, a visit to Bath. At each stopping point they take turns to do *vox pop* interviews with people they meet in the street.

The group was drawn imaginatively into this viewing. It seemed to offer a vision of freedom from the constraints of a day opportunities centre, a vision of the possibility of a way of living which you would certainly describe as 'different days'.

Conclusion

These first two days were marked by a meta-level of sense-making for all of us as to what the 'different' way of working might begin to mean. Until this became clearer to us, the focus on the cooperative inquiry issue of developing a more person-centred way of working with people with learning disabilities, would still be a bit diffused. However, I felt there was time for this to change.

With regard to my own parallel inquiry into the aesthetic in practice, these days offered many useful insights. I notice several perspectives about these two first days of Silver Street-2 that deserve some final brief comment.

Play

I have noted the sense of play that ran through some of the encounters on this first day. It revolved around sizing up each other and a focusing on the purpose and nature of what we were to work on together. The time-line exercise that we completed in the morning had the effect of pushing back some personal boundaries as people took a chance on revealing more about themselves, their lives and their families. Standing at the large wall display and adding items, people moved around each other with the energy and vivacity of a performance.

Despite the unpromising environment, there were moments when, on this and subsequent days, the setting became irrelevant, unseen, unfelt, – an example of the timelessness of deeply involving play to which Gadamer (1975) and Huizinga (1938) refer.

Some people were known to me quite well, others less so or not at all. In particular quite new to me, were Lucy and Beverley who were to prove influential in the way the play of the group unfolded. Beverley's teasing engagement with me, and mine with her, was the most direct expression of curiosity which was no doubt present for the group as a whole.

Navado's holding back during the time-line exercise suggested to me that he was more curious than most. He appeared for a moment to be a person who might spoil the game. Once he had overcome his initial caution about me and/or the group, his contributions became strong and characterful.

Poetics

The exercise with the postcards was an example of evocative processes I referred to in Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice.* It acted as a trigger to dialogue. The images on the cards tuned imaginatively into the feelings and dreams of people. They also became symbolic representations of unfulfilled hopes and needs, for example, the need for more religion and culture in the daily experience of the centre. In Shotter's terms (1993) the dialogue that we were opening up was full of anticipation of future meanings, – 'Where is this going?', 'What will this invitation to collaborate entail?'

So much of the meaning of the experienced moment was locked into the other-than-verbal – for example, the intonation, the vocal dynamic, the ethos of the room, my growing experience of relating to the person or group, a capacity in the group to listen, a selectivity about the value of what this or that person said or did. These all became part of our intrinsic aesthetic experience of this small community. The sound of the language and its resonances in the room resembles music, a form of poetics within which the words are embodied.

Action research

In this chapter I aimed to attend to, and reflect on my developing experience of action research, as this cooperative inquiry began. More than ever before, I found myself striving to define my facilitative role with the group as one of taking part in co-inquiry. I was clear from the start that my role was to support our learning, not of course the only person to do so, but with an acknowledged leadership function in doing this.

The most significant issue for me so far had been the complexity of trying to achieve what Heron and Reason refer to as **'an enabling balance within and between people of hierarchy, cooperation and autonomy', (Heron and Reason, 1997, p. 287).**

I began to trust more the sense of sharing responsibility for where our co-inquiry would lead. At the same time I was exploring some of the potentialities of my role of facilitation. For example, the initial rocky moment of Beverley's challenging whether this was a management palliative, a sop to the workers, may, if left unchecked by me, have spiralled downwards into a place of scepticism and denial.

The shaping of each day's progress and the activities seemed to me to be a form of creative bricolage, using the available constituents of people, the moment and serendipity to ring the best play out of the days.

I pause now in the account of this second Silver Street project. I regard it as a record of work in progress that raised many useful questions about my action research facilitation. I have used this material to explore how my decision to work within an action research approach played out in practice, a process that I will continue in subsequent chapters.

I will now turn my attention in Chapter 10, *Play in Practice*, to consider in greater detail the theme of play and drama, as it was evident to me throughout the next significant stage in this Silver Street action research project. In particular I shall describe what I found to be a remarkable next session at Silver Street where the process that we were using together was challenged by a participant.

Working sketch – Beneficial action, 12/5/06

Midway through the writing of this thesis I made myself the following note,

> 'The purpose of my inquiry cannot be solely to become the shrewd interpreter, the person who carries around a private portmanteau of theories which give me great insights into behaviour, almost like a secret weapon which is only made public in third person propositional writing.
>
> The theories that I am exploring in this thesis are for a purpose and need to be returned to action, to complete the cycle of an extended epistemology that has action as its summation. What do theoretical insights bring to living and practice? If there is no good answer to that, I am probably not engaging in action research.
>
> How will this make a difference to my practice or through this thesis contribute to others thinking about practice? Posing this question taps into a recurrent concern I have in reading the literature, about there being two worlds. One world is propositional and concerned with the detailed analysis and interpretation of everything from the mundane to the spiritual in organizational life, according to current paradigmatic perspectives. The other world is experiential and practical and is concerned with new actions and experiments in living. At their best, texts give a sense of these two worlds coming together. This is the importance of accounts of action research which aspire to generate shared theories-in-use leading to beneficial action with, and for individuals and communities.'

This working sketch holds me to the discipline of keeping practice and theories-in-use in dynamic interaction.

10 Play in practice

10 Play in practice

Introduction

Play is evident in many aspects of the life of Silver Street. People play games and puzzles. They enjoy discos on Black History week, coming to the Centre dressed in their own ethnic costume. The games dimension of play is experienced in swimming, walking and other sports activities such as cycling on specially adapted tandem bikes and tricycles. They paint and sculpt; they listen to music. In these senses play is more prevalent in this community than in many others.

In this chapter, however, I want to explore in what senses play is present within the intrinsic aesthetic of the Centre and in particular within the action research project, the start of which I described in the previous chapter. If so, how do play theories help structure my understanding of this dimension of practice? Also how does such an understanding influence me in my own reflexive experience of practice as well as when working with others?

In this chapter therefore I aim to,

- define what play in practice means to me
- analyse an incident in the Silver Street-2 project for its 'playfulness'
- assess the contribution that this understanding of play makes to my first and second person practice.

What play in practice means to me

Before analysing the continuing story of this Silver Street-2 project, I first want to set out what I understand to be some of the main parameters of play as a form of human interaction. In doing this I shall also consider in what sense playfulness is experienced in my personal and professional practice.

Play is a voluntary activity without purpose

The purposelessness of play has been commented on by a number of theorists, (Huizinga, 1938. Caillois, 1958, Gadamer, 1975). We define play in part by contrasting it with work, which has purpose. Play is voluntarily engaged in. If forced to play, we would probably not know where to start. Unwillingness to play by some, spoils the play for others.

Gadamer refers to Schlegel's view that play is recurrent but purposeless process,

> **'The movement of play has no goal that brings it to an end; rather, it renews itself in constant repetition.' (Schlegel, 1882, cited in Gadamer, 1975, p. 104)**

Gadamer reinforces this sense of the purposeless of play, which he sees as in no way diminishing its importance,

> **'So too it is an inadequate approach to ask what the life function and biological purpose of play is. First and foremost, play is self-presentation.' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 108)**

This idea that play is self-presentation suggests to me a connection with first person inquiry and autoethnography. First person inquiry and its expressive extension through autoethnography and other channels involve self-presentation. Although this may be done consciously and for a developmental purpose, the imaginative and improvisational qualities of reflexive thought and its representation are playfully unpredictable in their direction and outcomes, – hence the aptness of the 'journey' metaphor, used at intervals in this thesis.

There is playfulness to this travelling. The journey is worth making for what it may unexpectedly uncover, not in the hope of reaching a terminus.

Play is not 'ordinary' or 'real life'

Bateson (1975), Huizinga (1938) and Caillois (1958) each explore the difference between play and non-play. Derrida (1978) also points to how readily we distinguish between the artifice and theatre of, for example, all-in wrestling and unfettered aggressive fighting.

There is a similar awareness of the difference between spending time in an away-day together reflecting on work, and actually 'working'. There is a sense in which time spent in this way constitutes an 'artifice'. By the term 'artifice' I mean the group cultural conventions of 'development' days, which include going to a new venue and sitting in different relationships to those found in normal team work settings. The pattern of the day, from introductory warm-up activities, through large and small group sessions, to some sense of finale, emphasize that this is 'not real life', although it strives like drama to create imaginal analogues of real life. It might be seen as a microcosm, in its crafted beginning, middle and end, of the longer and less orderly cycles of working life.

Play creates order, *is* order

Huizinga (1938) comments on the essential function of the rules that govern team games, and which are often enforced by a referee. Deviation from this order 'spoils the game'; it has its rules, the infringement of which makes the non-compliant player a 'spoil sport'.

Gadamer (1975) takes a more metaphorical view of the rules of play when he claims that the 'field of the game' is defined by the spirit, rules and regulations of the game not by any physical boundaries that constrain it. He nevertheless regards this informing principle of 'field of the game' as an essential characteristic.

A set of rules concerning boundaries, time and place is seen to be necessary as a framework within which play is free to occur. Without such a framework play changes and degenerates.

Although play may be voluntary, without purpose and on occasions wild, it needs some containment, some shared understanding of boundary. Similarly experiencing the playfulness of an inquiry group also raises the issue of boundaries and conventions. The facilitator who ignores this, does so at her or his peril. In the Silver Street-2 story I am about to tell, the vital process of working out these boundaries and conventions can be seen taking place.

Play, art and organizations

The connection between play and art is widely asserted. Gadamer (1975) wrote about play in his discussion of the ontology of art, seeing it as a form of hermeneutic relating to the world. It is through playful improvisation and interaction that we inquire into and make shared meaning.

Gadamer describes how play is transformed into art; in particular he explores the relationship between play and a theatrical play and then considers the ways the roles of author, actor and audience contribute to its meaning in performance over time.

Barrett (1998) views the play involved in jazz riffs and inventions as a metaphor for improvisational processes in organizational life.

Shaw (2002) also sees a link between theatre and organizational life,

> **'I am suggesting that we could approach the work of organizational change as improvisational ensemble work of a narrative, conversational nature, a serious form of play or drama with an evolving number of scenes and episodes in which we all create our parts with one another.' (Shaw, 2002, p. 28)**

This captures very well for me the bricolage of playful encounters in my own experience of action research.

To conclude this section on the parameters of play I refer briefly to the definition of Caillois' four types of play already given in Part A, Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*, as these types have a clear relevance to the analysis which follows. Caillois (1958), describes four fundamental types or 'anthropological dispositions' of play; they are Alea, Agon, Ilinx and Mimesis.

To recap very briefly, Agon, or contest, forms the basis for all competitive team and individual games. Alea, or chance is found in many games, including gambling. Ilinx, or carnival occurs in revelry or Bacchanals. Mimesis encompasses all play where people assume roles and behave in imitation of others, including drama.

In illustrating how these types or dispositions manifest themselves Caillois draws on examples from early history as well as contemporary anthropology. Some of this material refers to rituals and ceremonies; much is drawn from organised games which have their roots in ritual.

In this chapter I shall examine how far these types can be related to the practice of action research. I have already drawn on this typology in analysing journal material earlier in the thesis. I shall do so in greater detail in the commentary which follows.

Front-line week 3 – 25/5/2004

It is to a particular moment in Week 3 of the Silver Street work with front-line staff that I now turn. I shall draw on the discussion of the parameters of play in the previous section, as I add my commentary to the journal record.

The mis-en-scène of the Irish Community Centre has already been referred to in the previous chapter. The unintended irony of the notice, *No dancing on the landings*, captured its quality very well for me. On the particular morning described in this journal entry the room allocated to us was too big by a factor of three, and left me feeling as though we were in a transit lounge. I arranged the chairs to create a more human scale of stage within this space. In the previous chapter I have already introduced some of the characters who were to play out this as yet unwritten script.

journal ... SCENE ONE – IAN'S INTERVIEW

Journal	Commentary
The programme today consists of a morning where I have decided to do some skills development on listening and giving feedback, followed by some initial thinking on the direction of our work together in the two inquiry groups. The afternoon is to be used in visiting Mencap.	
Reflecting on last week and the tension between my wish to achieve something and their being slow to take up the invitation, I had decided that the opening session on	

listening and dialogue might illustrate through practical example, a type of inquiring dialogue which would help them engage with each other and me. My plan was to find a volunteer to have a conversation with me while the rest observed; then I would invite them to find a partner and each in turn talk about an aspect of their work experience in order to receive some supportive feedback. I realise this was assuming an interventionist direction, but I judged that they had not had much experience of reflective dialogue with others.

So far in this session I have a sense of treading carefully into an unknown territory, a form of Alea. My risk was that there could have been a situation where no one wanted to volunteer. It might be too that, in offering an example of dialogue, the quality of it might not be evident or if it were that it did not inspire others to relate differently in their own subsequent practice sessions.

In fact it didn't quite turn out as planned.

I explained the purpose of what I was doing and then asked for a volunteer. Ian offered to talk to me. We arranged our chairs so that we felt OK for a conversation and that the observers could see our faces.

Ian too had taken a chance on volunteering to have the dialogue session with me.
I knew him better than others in the room and knew he would trust me not to set him up.

The conversation between Ian and myself started. He spoke about his anxiety about his new post as key worker. He had been a care assistant for twelve years and reckoned that he had gained a good reputation for his practice with service users. He felt his promotion might reduce the freedom he had come to value in developing work with users.

Sitting together in the centre of a circle of spectators created nervous anticipation which had elements of Agon or contest, the sort of encounter that the audience might associate with other competitions. Of course neither of us declared this to be a competition. But in my head I was matching myself to the occasion; can I make this into the sort of dialogue session that will

He also spoke very frankly about his worry about not being able to write very well. (Later in the morning he wrote some headings on a flipchart and I think he must be dyslexic. There were very few words that were spelt correctly.) He said he often checked his spelling in a dictionary that he carried. Navado said that the spelling checker in a PC could sort out a lot of these problems. Lucy added that grammar problems could be sorted out in the same way.

His new post would carry greater responsibilities, including writing to parents and carers, producing plans and doing reviews. I encouraged him to explore what was good about his present practice and what he might carry through of that into the new work. I also asked him how he had got support before. Who could he talk to about his concerns? He made it clear that he was pleased to be moving ahead and sounded as though he had enough energy to work on solving his concerns. I felt persuaded that this was so and told him that. He smiled.

The group spontaneously clapped their support. It felt like a better example of dialogue than I could have hoped for.

demonstrate a level of openness to each other? For Ian, he must have wondered how he would be seen and judged by an audience of peers.

This all seemed very supportive. I took this as a sign that in observing the small enactment between Ian and me, they had engaged imaginatively in Ian's story.

There was a respectful and wrapt quality about the silent listening, as in a play. The spontaneous applause from the group completed this act in a short celebration, the Ilinx that concludes the game of skill. Ian had shown very clearly that he had risen to the invitation of the dialogue. People showed their respect for this by clapping.

Ian's reflection on his new role is an example of imaginative mimetic projection. As the group listened to his hopes and concerns about taking up this post, some, like Stella, would have been imagining how they would handle this transition.

Through mimesis we experiment with other ways of being and acting. Mimesis is also evident in art. All first novels are supposed to be autobiographical in source, and maybe not just first ones. Music contains imitative reflections of human and other than human sounds. Drama presents mimetic personae, in relationships which are analogous to our own. No matter how close or distant the reflection, mimesis must have some place in the artistic process, as an expression of the individuality of the creator's eye, ear or hand. The mimetic process whether in life or art may be little more than a springboard for a new imagining. There is an original theme even if it is virtually lost in the many transformational variations. So too in this event we were constantly re-inventing through subtle in-the-moment performance the selves we wanted to present.

I am regularly aware of this mimetic process of influence in reflecting on my own experience. I notice how the 'presence' of influential people stays with me for varying periods. I hear myself sounding like them or hear them in others' voices. Such is the mimetic potency of close relationships that the Gestalt they create may remain there as a source of imaginal reference for a lifetime.

journal ... SCENE TWO – LUCY'S CHALLENGE

Journal	Commentary
Ian returned to his seat.	
As if from nowhere, although of course nowhere does not exist, Lucy laid down a barrage of preparatory disclaimers and caveats, along the lines of "Alan, I don't mean to upset you. I'm not saying this to be difficult. I'm not sure if I should be saying this."	
Sensing that something was in the offing, I said playfully, "Lucy, come on – spit it out." She replied, "OK, where is all this getting us? We are in Week 3 now and I wonder what we have achieved.	

What can I tell people that we have done? I get ready to come here and I wonder what we are learning?"

Holding on to my belief that action research is a shared responsibility, I know that this intervention is very valuable. I find myself without a shred of self-defensiveness or anxiety. (I can remember situations in the past where a challenge like this would have left me rocking on my heels.)

I do however feel peeved that Lucy has gone straight into this, without giving Ian any positive feedback. After all she too has just been promoted in a similar way. Maybe this is a bid for attention.
I look round the group.

I think back to De Board's account of Tavistock Interpersonal Relations programmes (De Board, 1978). Nearly thirty years ago I had attended one of the Tavistock's Leicester Conferences. Whilst I was not assuming the same austerity in my role with this group, nor was I offering the provocative Freudian analysis provided by Eric Miller and his consultant team, I felt my 'calmness' and listening stance had been right in this moment.

Then a flow of dialogue sets up around the room.

Journal

Navado: "Of course we are learning. I am learning from Alan; he is very calm. He is not a teacher who stands up and writes on a blackboard. That is not what we are doing. We are here to talk about our work and learn from each other. I thought at first a bit like you; what is this all about? But I saw how it is going. We are learning all the time."

Ian endorsed the point.

Donna who is sitting beside Navado, has been very quiet following her operation to remove wisdom teeth during

Commentary

The shape of the dialogue that surrounded Lucy's intervention consisted of an opening statement from Lucy as she questions me about the purpose of our working together. There then followed a series of responses which came from unpredictable directions around

the preceding week. She speaks quietly: "I have learnt a lot too. I'm learning to listen, to hear what other people think and do."

The next to me Stella speaks up; she has often been quiet during sessions.

"I wish I had known, Ian, what you were feeling about your writing. I held back from applying for that job because I had the same fear. If I had known, I might have tried for it."

She then went on to mention the Mandela poem I read to them in Week 1 and the video in Week 2 which she had found inspirational.

By this time I was wondering what Lucy might be feeling, faced as she was by this opposing affirmation of the quality of learning in the group. Why was she the only one to express her doubts about what we were achieving together?

I tried to sum up by thanking her for providing the stimulus to the group to reflect on their experience of how we are working together. I thanked the group for what they had said and added that I too was finding there was a lot to learn for all of us and what a privilege it was to have some time to work this way.
I reminded them that I had urged them to find a different way of learning, a play on the 'different' theme embedded in the Service's quest for different days for service users.

the room, each one filling in the space created by Lucy's question and the last response. This live enactment of relationships was for me an example of what Shaw (2002) aptly describes as 'improvisational ensemble work'. I hear in it the aesthetic form of musical play when an opening theme is handed round the orchestra in an embroidery of meaning.

I turned to Lucy and said that I also had been struggling to see what would emerge from the group, particularly last week when it was so hot and the going seemed hard; but the group had just given a spontaneous description of its learning. If she hadn't voiced her concern we would not have known.

Finally I said that I knew it was hard when the person who might be assumed to be responsible for leading everything, kept handing the task back to the group; but I still felt that this would serve us better in the long run.

Beverley sitting beside her said it was like I was watering the plants. I uttered an unspoken blessing on Beverley and replied that the best form of watering at this very moment was to break for a cup of tea. They laughed and we did.

While people made tea and coffee or went out for a smoke, I scribbled a few notes to capture some of the key moments of what had just happened. I felt truly alive to the group and would cheerfully have weighed this moment of practice in a positive scale against years of other work.

I notice now my concern that Lucy was becoming exposed in her position. It was however up to her to reflect on the gap, between her judgement of what was going on and that of others.

However it felt right to notice and voice in this way my own interest in her question. It was not only present in her. She was the one at that moment who was holding this question of purpose, for the group, and it needed to be attended to.

Improvisational plot

Re-reading this account I am reminded of the impact that the Lucy dialogue had on me, then and since. It was as though all the internal self-questioning that I had experienced over a number years about the type of group work I wanted to do, was being played out around me. It set me thinking about different types of knowing that we can seek out together, some propositional, others experiential, presentational and practical. Each is important and each has its own time and space in a group. The difference for me in working in a propositional way as part of an action inquiry is that I now aim to help the group build propositions from experience and reflection, rather than import them from elsewhere. In doing so I am not dogmatic to the extent that I would withhold theory that I felt might help a group move on.

However the predominant mode of knowing I now seek out, is created locally by us as we work together.

This is what I sensed was happening in the room on this morning. In this discussion the group had shown its capacity to work through a double loop of learning and reflect on how they were learning – quite remarkably and spontaneously, (Argyris, 1974). My judgement was firstly to be open to her question and secondly to give the group space to respond. In other words, listen and be quiet.

journal ... SCENE THREE – RESOLUTION

Journal	Commentary
When the group reassembled after the break, Beverley spoke up for herself and her friend, Lucy, both older women with a lot of experience of working with people with learning disabilities.	This continuation and development of the theme by Beverley had that dramatic quality of a theatrical play which has moved on during the interval.
Whatever they had said to each other about the last session outside the room I shall never know; but she now asked me if I wrote poetry, because when I had read them extracts from my Silver Street journal last week, they thought they were very poetic. I can only guess that this was their way of articulating what they found different or difficult about me. There was, I thought, also an element of placatory gift, unnecessary of course, but OK, if it got Lucy over the problem of mounting a critique which had then been dissipated by the group response. I said simply that I did and if they wanted, I'd read some next week.	When the curtain rises, the audience catches up with the changes that are imagined to have occurred. It is Beverley who acts as Lucy's foil in asking about poetry and who raises the possibility of tapping into my journal about our encounter. It almost becomes a play within a play, as she asks to see my script of what has happened.
Then to my astonishment Beverley said, "Would you write something about us?" I presume that she	She casts me in a role of

you write something about us?" I presume that she had picked up that I had done this in the autumn at Silver Street and now thought I might do the same about them. I had pondered after Week 1 whether I might share this writing with them but felt it would be too intrusive and might inhibit people, in much the same way as being videoed.

Now though I'm not sure; what might happen if I did read extracts complete with substitute names? (Later note: In fact this name swap idea proved ludicrous; I should have realised. When I read excerpts to them, they urged me to revert to their actual first names, which I have done.)

rapporteur of the group's words and actions. This springs from Beverley and Lucy's curiosity about how I see them. By describing what I might write as *poetic*, she is locating this relationship in a different territory, a place where 'normal' dialogue was less likely to occur, where something rarified and separate would happen. I feel a bit uncomfortable with this, but can see it helps them fix me in a place they can understand. However trying to be the cause of no disruption or surprise serves no one and leads to stasis.

What are we doing in groups?

In concluding this reflection on play in relation to this episode, I return to the question of validity and purpose in this form of inquiry.

In fact I too hold as valid the objection that Lucy raised – yes, I also would like to know what we are doing in groups. It is taking the writing of this thesis for me to find some deeper and more satisfying answers.

The explicit agenda of group events inevitably encompasses a 'silent implicative double', a concept described in Linstead (2000) to which I will return when I consider poetics in practice in the next chapter. From these tacit and implicit sources, the wishes and fears of the individual and the group become manifest. Whatever we hear in the explicit dialogue of the group, its silent double is in interaction with it, shaping and forming people's feelings and ideas in working together.

Lucy's intervention also has other implications for me as a facilitator. She made me question whether my stance towards action research facilitation was helpful to her or not. How long

could I hold back from running the sort of course she expected and wanted? In fact as the continuing story of this piece of work will show, by the end of the programme Lucy did deliver more in the way of ideas and material than others in the group. Although Beverley seemed to me to coast along, when she did speak, her comments were often very insightful. (She brought in a CD of excerpts of classical music for me to borrow between weeks. This token of friendship was much appreciated.)

I thought back to the introductory volunteering stage at Silver Street where I would have simply been working alongside Lucy and Beverley, as I had with Ian, for example. Crossing this boundary to take up a recognised role of facilitation brings with it different relationships and expectations, which I as facilitator needed to hold attentively in mind as we worked. It becomes my responsibility to manage this in introducing an action research approach where we subscribe to a more democratic way of inquiring together. I notice though that a valid alternative for me is to work alongside and interact with people. Whilst this still does not free me from the task of facilitation, it strips away some of the more formal structures associated with the artifice of an event-based practice. I'll return to this theme in the final chapter of this thesis.

I have described above Lucy's tentative challenge to the rules of the game that occurred when I was facilitating the second Silver Street project. In fact it seemed to me less of challenge than an opening for a new type of game; for the challenger she was registering her discomfort with the way the rules had so far been defined. Understanding and agreeing the rules of play in the free flow of sessions should be a continuous process of reflection and agreement. When people go off on different tracks with different rules, there will be friction. The artifice of practice events may be less formally constrained than a sport or other games, but it still defines itself by mutually accepted rules.

Links with expressive play in organizations

I recognize in my emphasis on attending to the intrinsic play and drama of action research, I have said nothing about the expressive use of theatre in inquiry. (This falls into line with my declared position in this thesis of avoiding writing about methods of which I have had little direct experience.)

Explicit links between dramatic play and practice have been made by groups like the Danish theatre company Da Capo Teatret (2006) and Olivier's (2006) Mythodrama based in the UK. These take theatre into organizations and work with issues of importance to participants. Olivier (2006), for example, inquires into people's understanding of issues such as

leadership or politics through live presentation of excerpts of Shakespearean drama and subsequent work based in part on Jungian theories of archetypal roles. Taylor, (2000 and 2005) draws on his expertise and experience in play-writing and performing, as a vehicle for inquiry into organizational life in the academy and in business. In his most recent production which I saw performed in Kraków in September 2006, he uses a playful account of the transition of his hero through death into a limbo between heaven or hell, to explore issues of power and manipulation in becoming a member of, and influencing organizations.

Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (1995) works through a form of participative action inquiry using dramas on significant social issues that are written and performed in community settings. The audience is then invited by a 'joker' intermediary role to participate in re-writing problematic moments; the actors then perform according to these audience interventions and thereby prompt a further round of reflection and decision-making in the audience.

I have so far only experienced these approaches as a participant in conference programmes, but hope to form a fuller judgement of their value to my practice as further opportunities arise.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, accounts of my practice include examples of intrinsic and spontaneous play and I highlight these as they occur. In this chapter I have explored play as an embedded experience in practice. The way in which practice is facilitated can lead to more playful and creative experiences for all participants. However, moving in this direction requires sensitivity to the expectations that some groups hold about rules and purpose.

In this chapter I have reviewed the main parameters of play and recapped on theories of play as defined by Huizinga (1938) and further developed by Caillois (1958). The four domains or dispositions – Agon, Alea, Mimesis and Ilinx were described. These theoretical elements of play were then applied to an account of a day with a group of front-line staff during the piece of work referred to as Silver Street-2.

The story of Ian's interview and the subsequent challenge about purpose by Lucy have been analysed using the framework of play parameters and types referred to above. The dramatic structure of this session was described, as were different types of play relationship. I also used this example to plot aspects of my growing sense of security in working within an action research approach.

My interest in play has so far developed through analysis of the *intrinsic* play that I experience in practice. This influences my facilitation style with regard to, for example, the balance between the freedom that is synonymous with play and the equally important holding of boundaries around this freedom.

I added a brief note to recognize that aesthetic inquiry can also take a more expressive stance through the introduction of theatre into organizational contexts. This currently lies beyond my own practice experience.

In the next chapter I explore the sense in which the poetic permeates practice and I will also note the extent to which the poetic interweaves with play, both in the literature and in practice.

11 Poetics in practice

11 Poetics in practice

Introduction

The poetic in practice has been referred to regularly throughout the thesis, as I have commented on different examples of intrinsic or expressive aesthetic inquiry. Now in this chapter I want to focus on my evolving understanding of the poetic in practice as a theoretical concept as well as through my work as it developed in Silver Street and elsewhere.

My aim in doing this is to,

- define how I am using the term *poetics in practice*
- explain the concept of negativity or the silent implicative double and apply it to my work
- similarly explore the concept of metaphor in relation to practice
- present and analyse an item of experimental fiction as a form of poetic inquiry into practice.

After a short introductory definition of 'the poetic', the first section of the chapter will be built around two fragments of imagery drawn from my journals. These are offered and discussed as examples of first person inquiry through the poetic, which I experience as being at the root of all aesthetic practice.

Referencing Linstead (2000) I will next consider the concept of negativity or the silent implicative double. This will be shown to be an influential 'shadow' or pervasive poetic presence within all communications. It will be argued that this negativity in poetic statements makes them more accessible to a shared sense-making.

This concept of the silent implicative double will be illustrated by reference to a journal item entitled 'Black holes'. In this account of my conversation with a man called Tony, I notice levels of negativity in our dialogue and the Pinteresque quality in its dramatic structure.

In the next section I consider the function of metaphor as foundational process in all symbolic representation. I draw on the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Gadamer (1975) to show that metaphor also contributes to the development and organization of

concepts, as well as sensory and aesthetic knowing. Its embeddedness and pervasiveness in dialogue and other forms of representation is such that it is often below the threshold of conscious notice.

A consideration of an expressive mode of the poetic concludes the chapter. An experimental piece of fictional writing will be used as a means of exploring further my relationship with disability as it is poetically constructed in this piece of writing.

What do I understand by the poetic in practice?

My understanding of the term *the poetic in practice* has developed as my inquiry has unfolded during this period of research. In particular I have questioned whether the meaning of the *poetic* changes when combined with *practice* and if so in what ways. Just as I have argued that play is purposeless, so too art, and within it poetry, is not created to serve a purpose; where it is, I experience it as losing a rich ambiguity and imaginal evocation, in trying to serve a functional agenda.

As Keats (1820) put it,

> **'Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,**
> **Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,**
> **Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine -**
> **Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made**
> **The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.' (Keats 1820, in 1999 edition, p. 229)**

Levin (1988) also features the consequence of imposing too many propositional rules on the 'pursuit of aletheia',

> **'when the truth that belongs to propositional discourse is allowed to regulate our poetizing, it brings the play of sounds and meanings, the interplay of words and experiencing, to a stop.' (Levin, 1988, p.433. Cited in Linstead, 2000, p. 73)**

As referenced in the working sketch at the end of Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*, GM Hopkins also knew that, in experiencing the phenomenon of the rainbow, **'it was a hard thing to undo this knot'**.

I came across the following reference in Bachelard (1958), which I found very influential in developing my own understanding of the phenomenological potency of the poetic image,

> **'To say that the poetic image is independent of causality is to make a rather serious statement. But the causes cited by psychologists and psychoanalysts can never really explain the wholly unexpected nature of the new image, any more that they can explain the attraction it holds for a mind foreign to the process of its creation. The poet does not confer the past of his image upon me, yet his image immediately takes root in me. The communicability of an unusual image is a fact of great ontological significance. ... In order to clarify the problem of the poetic image philosophically, we shall have to have recourse to the phenomenology of the imagination.' (Bachelard, 1958, translated in1969, p xvii to xviii)**

In Chapter 8, *The expressive in practice*, I described how I had chosen to read a Frost poem and noticed how this had resonated with the group; I see this as an example of what Bachelard calls **'the phenomenology of the imagination'**. What struck me was the poetic potentiality of the moment of reading this particular poem and its capacity to elicit feelings and ideas in the group. In this case then poetry was not without purpose. So maybe it is necessary to look more closely at the meanings I am attaching to *purpose*.

With Bateson (1972), I would distinguish between 'human purposefulness' which might seek to use art for commercial, political or social purposes, and poetic *mind* in which the imagination of the artist and the responsive individual participate in co-creating new meanings. In this case, for example, I think of the extraordinary trail of participation between the Frost's original creative shaping of these words, and their imaginative reception at the moment of this time, place and context. It can in a phenomenological sense be claimed that poetry *uses* us, as much as we, it.

As Rich (2006) puts it,

> **' I hope never to idealise poetry – it has suffered enough from that. Poetry is not a healing lotion, an emotional massage, a kind of linguistic aromatherapy. Neither is it a blueprint, nor an instruction manual, nor a billboard.'**

I therefore want to inquire into the poetic in practice not as if it were some form of tool but rather in the sense that it is both transformative and transformed as each individual

participates in it. The phenomenological moment of reading a poem re-creates it and is experienced by the reader as re-creative.

The term *poetic* I take also to be a wider aesthetic concept than *poetry*, although poetry is one of its most intensely expressive forms. Rather I have come to use the term *the poetic* to encompass all those processes of shaping imagination, whether spoken, written, dramatic, visual or kinaesthetic, whereby we represent our experiences through narrative, imagery and symbols. Inevitably then any consideration of the phenomenon of practice draws on the poetic.

There are other dimensions to the term *poetic* which need closer examination. Midgley (2001) problematizes the cultural divide between poetry and science as a form of epistemological schism. This is also expressed in the dialectical tension between propositional social science inquiry and a growing interest in ethnographic and action research inquiries. She explains that for Wordsworth and Coleridge the arts and the sciences were not seen to be in opposition.

> **'Here was the scene of the process of creation, both in art and science – not a mass of idle and delusive fancy, but a constructive faculty, building experience into visions which made both feeling and thought effective. A poet, said Wordsworth, had to be "a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply ... Our thoughts ... are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings".' (Midgley, 2001, p. 75/Wordsworth, 1802, [1936, 2nd edition, p. 935])**

Wordsworth focuses on the creativity which is found in both art and science in a way which is still timely. Thinking in this way resists tendencies to marginalize either epistemological stance. He also reminds us that our thoughts **'are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings'**.

The relationship between thoughts and feelings in organizational life has been explored in Fineman (2000); he concludes that,

> **'Rationality is no longer the 'master' process; nor is emotion. They both interpenetrate; they flow together in the same mould.' (Fineman, 2000, p.11)**

Huizinga (1938) claims a central place for poetry in the process of civilization,

> **'Poetry everywhere precedes prose; for the utterance of solemn or holy things poetry is the only adequate vessel.' (Huizinga, 1938 p. 127)**

He illustrates his claim by extensive anthropological references including the fact that until 1868 the Japanese composed the weightiest parts of state documents in poetic form.

He continues,

> **'All poetry is born of play: the sacred play of worship, the festive play of courtship, the martial play of contest, the disputatious play of braggadocio, mockery and invective, the nimble play of wit and readiness.' (ibid., p. 129)**

Linstead (2000) claims that it is through play in the spaces between the propositional and the poetic that meaning unfolds. He also connects poetic discourse with social science inquiry and in particular features ethnographic uses of poetry as a means of inquiry and of the presentation of inquiry. He describes ways in which poetry may be incorporated into research, ranging from encapsulating the aesthetic dimension of the ethnographic situation, thus creating a richer account, – to becoming a 'voice' which echoes across several works charting the development of the authorial 'self' over time.

This, Linstead sees, as a means of redressing the privilege that cognition and propositional structures are given in research writing.

(This is not to conflate two related but different ideas, – on the one hand, an intrinsic experience of the poetic in practice and on the other, aesthetic ways of representing this in research writing. It would be surprising though if there were little or no contingency between the two. As I write this section I can defend the propositional treatment of the poetic, whereas elsewhere it is equally essential to explore aesthetic concepts such as this through aesthetic means.)

Winter et al. (1999) see aesthetic processes as offering a complex but vital medium through which to understand the similarly complex and open-ended processes of organizational life.

To bring the focus closer to this present task of thesis writing, Heen (2005), in researching the place of feelings in action research, asserts how best they can be represented,

> **'In a situation, body language communicates our feelings, but if we are to communicate feelings outside the immediate situation, it is usually more effective to use poetic language, an artistic form or other means of analogue communication, than analytical terms.' (Heen, 2005, p. 273)**

Fleeting images

Having reflected on my current understanding of the poetic in practice, I now switch modes of inquiry into the poetic and consider two fleeting Silver Street images and how their perception and representation influenced my inquiry. In starting with them I want to show how the poetic springs from reflexive in-the-moment practice. What renders them poetic is the quality of participation between the moment and those who are open to it. As my inquiry has developed I can see how this poetic is enhanced by the process of representation, which in these examples is through writing. The discipline of doing this brings to the foreground of my attention other such moments as they occur.

I do not wish to portray this as some form of 'nectar collection' by an erratic butterfly, although on occasions it can have this sort of serendipity. The poetic invitation of the moment and the inquiry into it which follows holds for me the essence of the relationships with place, people and action that I am experiencing in practice.

These pieces do not therefore claim to be poetic because they have been shaped in terms of metre, line length or other conventions of poetry, as is the case in some of my other writing in Chapter 2, *The inquiring 'I'*. They are the fragmented residues of what occurred, a working note, written sparsely and as close to the experience as possible. Their poetics lie in the experienced moment. Their selection and description allows space for imaginative projection into the moment by others and myself.

journal ... The bus stop

Journal

As I was waiting for a bus on my way home, I saw Yannis, a young Greek service user, walking along the opposite side of the street, his arm tucked in that of his carer, a middle aged black woman. There was something moving in this seeing moment.

I was struck by the familiarity and intimacy of the white arm crossed with the black, an ethnic difference long since lost in the day-to-day process of shared lives. I had previously created in my mind's eye a fictitious Greek family for Yannis. Yannis and his real carer belong to a community, hopefully as least as caring as people's birth families. The fact that they are Greek and Caribbean is of no practical import to either.

This length of street, I thought, is part of his world, his familiar patch, as he walks, head slightly high looking ahead, unaware of me.

Commentary

This fleeting encounter at the bus stop, I unseen across the road, but Yannis seen by me, is simply represented in my brief story.

The closeness of the couple arm-in-arm re-connected me to my childhood, my mother. It prompted some deep recollection of that sense of being at the end of the day after school and all those sessions as a small child spent with my mother walking between Sainsbury's and Mence Smiths in North Watford.

In making this link I also felt an empathy for the childish vulnerability, and the enjoyment of Yannis.

The language in the closing glimpse of Yannis is evocative, because of its sparse visual accuracy. This is my filmic record of the moment. It resonates with me in much the same way that a fleetingly held cinematic shot at the end of a sequence would. The bare words have an evocative potency of visual recall, which I experience, as poetic.

I notice the very different mode of representation in the two columns above.

The left column is my working sketch of what happened – the fusion or participation that I experienced in seeing Yannis as a self-presentation, a poetic phenomenon, expressive of so much my experience in Silver Street.

The commentary adds a layer of personal association and also introduces the extra framing of the closing sentence as a filmic cadence. As I wrote this last comment I found myself re-imagining this quality of the moment more deeply. The moment and the comment are held in an even balance, the one informing the other, neither dominating the other.

On the next page I move to a second fragment.

journal ... I have come to bring you life – don't miss out

I write now about a moment during a solitary walk I made one morning back to Silver Street after a visit to one its satellites.

Journal

I pause to look at an Anglican church, which displays on its noticeboard a large laminated photo of a happy and numerous congregation standing in front of the church. I am caught by the immediacy of the injunction to phone, rather than 'miss out' on life. The girl with the 'Miss Sexy' tee shirt forms a delightful sub-plot in this busy picture. The red and black text provides a static footing to the photo. The sun always shines on in the photo. The congregation surges towards the church gates – no dusty empty pews here. They appear within a dramatic narrative of a musical chorus line. Their arms are raised as if on the completion of a show and make us into their applauding audience.

Commentary

This description speaks about my reflexive relationship with the social context of my Silver Street inquiry. I knew that this image would continue to resonate with me. I see this as a sign of the poetic potency of the participation between the picture and me in this moment.

This combined aesthetic statement, the photo and the text, also connects with earlier references in this thesis to the depth and poetic potency of *place*. Place is one important factor which conditions and frames what is found to be remarkable or normal.

I also reflect on why this statement claims my attention in this way. Bachelard (1958) was referenced above in his comment on **'the wholly unexpected nature of the new image'**. I do not see this photo/text item as material for sociological analysis, for example, of ethnicity – although I can imagine how sharing it with a group could lead to an exploration of this issue. I see this as an aesthetic participation between an iconic photo and the 'me' who saw it. Its capture in word and picture leaves a trace which can evoke further imaginal re-creations. For example, it might prompt me to extend the angle of vision that is taken in and to include more of myself as the photographer. Either element, text or photo, in separation from each other would lose some of this poetic extension of meaning, although it could be argued that the act of taking and publishing the photo in itself constituted the original poetic statement.

Taking a step back from these two fragments, I notice how the addition of commentary has further layered their meaning. They become more complex in their mix of propositional interpretation. There is also something satisfying in their being contained visually in their two separate columns, just as the text and the picture are separate in the photographed image.

Negativity and metaphor

To continue the inquiry theme of this chapter, I now give an account of how the literature has opened up two further dimensions of the poetic in ways which inform my practice. These two dimensions are the concept of *negativity* or a *silent implicative double* which is an intrinsic part of the poetic and the second is *metaphor* when considered not only as a literary device, but as a pervasive way of inquiring into and making sense of the experienced world.

Linstead's (2000) claims that the poetic can be seen as the source of other discourses. He cites Levin's view that **'propositional discourse arises from poetic, not the other way round'** (Levin, 1988, p. 437). He claims that it is out of the **'inescapable slipperiness'** of poetic discourse that we create our own meaning. Poetic imagery evokes associations through the richness of metaphor and narrative. To describe it as 'slippery' is to recognize that it holds open the potentiality of multiple meanings. Perhaps part of the metaphorical image of slipperiness is that of oils, which loosen meaning.

Negativity or the silent implicative double

I want firstly to give some attention to the concept of the 'silent implicative double' and have found Linstead (2000) a useful guide to this concept. (Brief reference has already been made to negativity in discussing play in the previous chapter.)

The poetic may be seen as existing on the fringe of the unsayable. Linstead (2000) describes this quality in the following way,

> **'All language carries with it a silent, implicative double, which supports it, carries it and allows it to do its work. The 'postmodern' theorizing of Lyotard and Derrida in particular has attempted to address this important area of the unsaid and the unsayable, the sublime, the différend, recognizing that the life without silence is unlivable.' (Linstead, 2000, p. 61)**

I notice in my work how I am developing more of a skill in listening for the lacunae which indicate the presence of what Linstead also describes as the 'underside' of dialogue. I think of a recent case where my attention was caught by the persistent use of the word 'colleague' in the narrative of a senior manager. It was so uniform in its use that it implied some spacing between her and her immediate associates sitting in the room around her. It was as though the manager felt less at home with naming people directly. The word 'we' seemed frequently to be suppressed in favour of 'colleagues'. I found myself speculating why this should be and I hypothesized that for her to have used 'we' might have implied a closer more equal relationship than she wanted with her team. It also carried suggestive indications about the importance of professional protocol that she wanted to model for her team in its dealings with the rest of the organization. In listening for the hidden or negative significance that it contained, I detected the controlling process which I felt was being transacted within this word 'colleague'.

The underside of dialogue may be actively denied; inquiry into its meaning may be suppressed by the prevailing propositional narratives within communities and organizations. In these cases its influence passes without conscious notice or challenge but it is none the less potent for that. A passing connection may be made here with Carter and Jackson (2000) and their concept of the 'an-aesthetic' in organizations, which I referenced earlier in Chapter 9, *Action research in Silver Street-2*.

However this concept of negativity relates to all transactional processes, not just those where organizational power is brokered. Linstead (2000) proposes that poetic language is more open to negativity and that this may offer access to 'aleatory truths'

> **'...., we can become alert to the situation that the silent double, the underside of the text, carries with it its own form of truth - aletheia, or the aleatory truth of negativity. We might then be concerned with distinguishing between those forms of language that seek to become open to incursions of negativity, and those which tend to suppress it. By analogy, as we move to consider the underside of organization, we would need to consider methodologies which similarly allow chance, surprise and flashes of insight their legitimate place.' (ibid. p.72)**

I have come to see the poetic as a means of inquiry which offers up its own form of truth; this is to be found in the silent implicative double that surrounds what I say and what I hear said in practice situations. One of the tasks of reflexive inquiry is to acknowledge and make sense of this negativity, as far as it yields itself to reflection. I shall give an example of this process in the next section.

In talking about the conceptual functions of metaphor Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also make a link with the concept of the unsayable, or the silent implicative double which shadows speech,

> **'Every true statement, therefore, necessarily leaves out what is downplayed or hidden by the categories used in it.' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p.163)**

I also find myself returning to Gaston Bachelard (1958) and his description of the concept of 'home'. In doing so he adopts the language of dreams and poetic images,

> **'Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams: we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.' (Bachelard, 1958, p. 6)**

This leads me to think that the 'poetry that is lost', shadows all our expressive acts. It is as though through poetry we approach the unsayable as an act of faith knowing that in these spaces which come into and out of focus, lie our dreams, passions and fears.

In Bachelard's terms, the purpose of my inquiry might be framed as the development of a certain kind of alertness to the emotions that form this lost poetry in my own aesthetic life and in live practice with others.

I include below a journal item from Silver Street in which I explore the potency of the silent implicative double in practice.

Negativity, Tony and me

There were occasions in Silver Street where I felt myself to be 'in conversation' with profoundly disabled non-verbal service users. The nail painting session described in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*, was one such. With people with more moderate learning disabilities, I could communicate verbally, but the dialogue often took unexpected turns. A different set of narrative conventions about what might be of interest often moved the resulting dialogue onto a new level of eloquence. In the example that follows I can hear a quality of poetic drama in the encounter described. I will also try to explore the enormous penumbra of implicative double that surrounds the dialogue.

In a Silver Street satellite housed in a former primary school, the day opportunities service cares for a larger group of people with moderate learning difficulties. Here I met and talked with Tony. The context is that I am sitting in an art class chatting with people as they draw or paint.

journal ... Black holes

Journal	Commentary
Tony comes over and begins a conversation with me that is to go on intermittently all afternoon. He is in his fifties and very early on says the most remarkable thing to me. "I hope you can come here for ever." I am caught by the fact that I have never before received such a declaration.	Now the story resembles for me one of those accounts of a delightful exchange that sometimes happens between strangers on a train or a boat. I was held captive by it as I tuned in to its conversational register.

He intrigues me in his need to associate and sadly I find myself wondering if this has ever got him into trouble elsewhere in a world that lacks his generosity of spirit.

He is sticking strips of paper round an inflated balloon, which will be popped once the papier maché is set. He comes over to Julie and I.

The conversation suddenly lurches onto death. "Both my mum and dad are dead", he says. Julie replies, "My brother died. My brother died. My brother died, he did." Trevor notices that she is getting upset at the memory. "Don't get depressed", he says in a very matter-of-fact way. We turn back to Julie's picture, where the small amount of her drawing which received all our praise is now being obliterated by her gluing a large piece of material over it, as she enters the collage phase of the afternoon.

Across the table Betty is drawing with a black pencil on a large sheet of paper. Her work unfolds as a more or less symmetrical pattern of flowers and scrolls. She seems very absorbed in doing this and smiles as she looks up. I am impressed by her skill, but gather from Melvin, the artworker running the session, that this may be what she always does, many times over. Later in the afternoon Melvin and Betty have a

The ambience of this satellite unit was reminiscent of the primary school, which had once occupied this '30s building.

Tony's effortless reading of Julie's impending distress was impressive; they obviously know each other well after many years of sharing in art classes and other activities.

I notice here that in the telling I want to capture the enormity of the challenge facing Melvin as he nips round the room trying to help Julie, and too many others, develop new ways of expressing themselves through drawing model-making and painting.

wonderfully messy foray with acrylic paint, as an extension of her drawing.

I am now sitting by Trevor again. He asks me if I know Buddy Holly. He's struck lucky here, because I am able to sing a few words from *Peggy Sue*.

It was here that our dialogic relationship began to take off.

As he moves on through a catalogue of knowledge about the '60s and astrology, fragments of his biography slip out. He spent time in a boarding school. He walks to and from the Centre and lives by himself, although I assume that this might be in some form of sheltered accommodation.

He is curious about me and as he questions me, he can offer a more or less matching anecdote from his own life, to make an agreeable conversation. Some of this is characterized by a quiz-like interaction, for example, "Do you know what sign I am?" I work my way clumsily through Aquarius, Cancer etc until we get to his sign.

"Do you believe in black holes?", he asks. There seemed something extraordinarily surreal about this moment as the two of us sat there, he with his fingers covered with glue, I helping Susan glue sticky-backed plastic pieces on to her collage because neither of us could get the backing paper off. To be contemplating the origins of the universe with Tony at this moment in Silver Street with the autumn settling down in the

damp fallen leaves on the playground outside was - unique.

When we prepared to go, he asked me if I would be here tomorrow. I said, "No." He said he would be sorry. He set off to walk home. I waited at the bus stop and was roundly abused by the Chinese driver in front of a crowded bus for trying to get on through the off-door, his not having opened the on-door. The world can be a cruel place.

This is my sign-off; it was a silly incident, being made to look foolish on the bus, when my head was full of Tony and the afternoon. I fear far worse may have befallen Tony in his life.

Having shortly after this moment seen again Peter Hall's production of Pinter's *The Betrayal*, I made a connection between its rhythm of dialogue, its eloquent silences and repetitions, and my conversation with Tony. There was a poignancy about his wanting to connect with me, about the dialogic content which held us agreeably together at one level, but which teetered on the brink of the surreal at another.

This conversation highlighted for me the power of the unsayable, the phenomenological negativity referred to above. Behind the words runs another flow of meaning, an interpretative but unspoken dialogue. By definition I cannot express this negativity other than sketchily and in retrospect. At the time it was in full play as a dialogic process between us. From my perspective it might now be fuzzily sketched in as I explore my sense of deep curiosity about,

- Tony's amassing of so many facts and his use of them as counters in a conversational game
- my not knowing the answers to a number of his questions but this not mattering unless it caused him to connect less closely with me
- my externality to the conversation, knowing throughout that I was the one, not he, who would be later getting on the bus out of town
- sensing and responding to his need for human warmth and contact. (His regret that we would not meet tomorrow, was touching. I also left with a sense of guilt at the ease of my departure and fixedness of his staying.)

- my sadness that a regular continuity of this conversation in the future would almost certainly be inappropriate to his needs as we might lock into a lifetime's iterative quiz game, with no way out.

I was struck by the way our lives had run in parallel with at least 45 years of overlap, of common memories of music, events, scientific discoveries that we could both share. At the same time I could only guess at the asymmetry of our lives, the different opportunities, pleasures, pains which would be harder to share. Yet in his and my content with the afternoon together we were connected.

I take from this a further reflection on the inquiry context and method which meeting Tony had created. In more structured and 'purposeful' facilitated dialogue the space for these experiences of the silent implicative double might have been squeezed out. The context of *being beside and with* has proved to be a creative one for me; the method of *having no method* other than an openness to what happens between us also deserves further reflection. I shall return to this in Part D.

I now consider the second of the two dimensions of the poetic in practice that I referred to above, that is, metaphor.

Metaphor in practice

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) approach metaphor by placing it within what they refer to as an experientialist paradigm, which I take to have some link with my own understanding of phenomenological ontology. Meaning in metaphor is seen to reside between and within the disparate elements it draws together.

The relevance of their thinking to my inquiry into the poetic in practice is well pointed up in the following quotation,

> **'New metaphors are capable of creating new understandings and therefore new realities. This should be obvious in the case of poetic metaphor, where language is the medium through which new conceptual metaphors are created.**
>
> **But metaphor is not merely a matter of language. It is a matter of conceptual structure. And conceptual structure is not merely a matter of the intellect – it involves all the natural dimensions of experience, including aspects of our sense experiences: color, shape,**

> **texture, sound, etc. These dimensions structure not only mundane experience but aesthetic experience as well. Each art picks out certain dimensions of our experience and excludes others. Artworks provide new ways of structuring our experience in terms of these natural dimensions. Works of art provide new experiential gestalts and, therefore, new coherences.' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 235)**

In stepping so deftly, in these four sentences, across this territory of metaphor, they make connections which are very relevant to this inquiry. I want briefly to retrace these steps and also make connections with other aspects of metaphor as I go.

Firstly they distinguish between metaphor as a matter of language, which it clearly is, and metaphor as a means of creating conceptual structure. As they point out elsewhere, metaphor provides a conceptual meta-structure,

> **'... most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured; that is, most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts.' (Ibid., 1980, p. 56)**

The relationship between metaphor generation and concept building is also well defined by Gadamer (1975), when he claims that,

> **'Language has performed in advance the abstraction that is, as such, the task of conceptual analysis. Now thinking need only make use of this advance achievement.' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 103)**

Metaphors influence our choices about how we conceptualise experience. Many concepts that appear to be espoused as rational argument, may also attract us because of their metaphorical clothing. As Lakoff and Johnson claim,

> **'The intuitive appeal of a scientific theory has to do with how well its metaphor fits one's own experience.' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 19)**

They then identify that metaphorical conceptualization is not just 'a matter of the intellect' but includes all our sensory experience, and therefore inevitably also our aesthetic experience. The idea that sensory experience is 'made sense of' through metaphor is a powerfully poetic concept. In experiencing 'déjà vu', or its equivalence in other sensory channels, metaphorical connections are made between the moment and other parts of our

lives. Lakoff and Johnson go on to refer to the metaphorical structuring of experience through artworks. In privileging certain dimensions, the artwork relegates others. This may be another way of understanding negativity within the range of artistic media. Their argument is also persuasive of the importance of working through more than one medium, as each relates to different senses.

Later Lakoff and Johnson claim that,

> **'A large part of self-understanding is the search for appropriate personal metaphors that make sense of our lives.' (ibid., p.233)**

Our choice of metaphors in everyday conversation becomes habitual and yet through reflection it can reveal some of the sense-making processes by which we live. I recall a moment when I said to a colleague who had been trained as a Gestalt therapist that I was curious about how to 'get off the hook of (an issue) that we were grappling with'. He drew my attention to the emotive metaphor of pain and entrapment that I had used. That was how I was feeling about the particular problem at that time and his intervention prompted me to question why.

I notice the extent to which in practice organizational language employs metaphorical structures to support the process referred to earlier in Chapter 9, *Action Research in Silver Street-2*, as a form of an-aesthetic, (Carter and Jackson, 2000). The expression *rolling out programmes across the organization* is intended, by those who use it, to convey orderly implementation which reaches all departments and teams. It shares a linguistic provenance with phrases such as *business process re-engineering* or *knowledge management*. In fact the *rolling* metaphor also has a counter association of flattening, crushing or forcing the crooked to be straight and 'the rough places plain'. Whilst it would be tiresome to point out to co-inquirers all such metaphorical usages as some form of linguistic corrective, metaphors do act as indicators of some form of denial and invite an exploration of how people feel about being in the path of 'rolled out' initiatives. The conversation about the perceived ownership of the *Different Days* programme described in Chapter 6 might be seen as such an example; even the concept of *owning* an abstraction called a *programme* has a metaphorical resonance.

Lakoff and Johnson's inquiry into metaphor provides insights that have direct application in working with individuals and groups. The authors take an eminently pragmatic view of interpersonal communication,

> **'When the chips are down, meaning is negotiated; you slowly figure out what you have in common, what is safe to talk about, how you can communicate unshared experience or create a shared vision. With enough flexibility in bending your world view and with luck and skill and charity, you may achieve some mutual understanding.' (Ibid., p. 231)**

It is therefore through a web of these miniature poetic structures that we conduct dialogue with others or with ourselves in reflective writing. (The sensuous imagery of the last sentence was unpremeditated in any particularly conscious level as I wrote, but the architecture of a web containing small sub-structures had an attraction for me and has provided the imaginative space for me to articulate what I had in mind.)

The expressive poetic in practice

Elsewhere in this thesis I give examples of expressive activities that I regard as poetic in their way of communicating. Specific examples include the Robert Frost poetry reading discussed in the Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice*, and the reference to the use of fridge magnet poetry as a way of inviting people to experiment with poetic writing. However as this chapter makes clear, the poetic is not restricted to words and several examples of model-making and drawing which have already been discussed, illustrate the poetic in practice. In Chapter 12 which follows I describe the use of symbolic modelling as I complete the story of Silver Street-2 which has been threaded through Part C.

I now want to explore further how expressive poetic statements contribute to my inquiry. I start by returning to some of the literature on autoethnographic writing.

Sparkes (2002) in his defence of multi-voiced texts refers to the work of Brett Smith (1999) in which the writer provides a narrative of self as he undergoes severe clinical depression. I am interested in the way Sparkes comments on Smith's approach to its writing,

> **'Smith's messy text, in the form of short stories and poetry, is intended to evoke the reader's vulnerabilities, ambiguities and ongoing struggles, as well as the gendered nature of his condition, by inviting the reader-as-*bricoleur* to rupture the traditional**

> **pattern of scientific knowing and to "feel, hear, taste, smell, touch, and morally embrace the world of depressions." ' (Smith, 1999, p. 275, cited in Sparkes, 2002, p. 219)**

Casting the reader as a *bricoleur* captures very well the more active participation that 'messy texts' invite. The propositional text of 'scientific knowing' sets up a different relationship with the reader, not so much offering a moral 'embrace', but keeping the reader at arm's length. There are narratives where this may seem entirely appropriate. However the nature of inquiries which take an action research approach calls for a form of representation which mirrors the complex unfolding of the experiences described.

Fineman (2000) in writing on ways of researching emotions in organizations, endorses a multi-voiced fictional approach,

> **'Here, perhaps, we have something to learn from the poet, novelist and dramatist who have long explored emotions 'in the round'. A social science of emotions is rendered no less systematic or rigorous by finding different voices, or expressive forms, to convey crucial experiences and meanings.' (Fineman, 2000, p. 15)**

As my writing of this thesis progressed, I wanted to write in more experimental ways about the experiences of Silver Street and elsewhere. To end this section on the expressive poetic in my practice, I therefore include overleaf an excerpt from a story that I have written; it is based on my Black Hole conversation with Tony and an amalgam of other encounters. In this case I will reproduce the text as written and then offer some commentary afterwards.

Tony's story

I'll go down to the centre today. If I don't go someone will be after me. They'll spot me missing and ring Gloria. On the other hand I could just stay here. I've got a magazine to do; I found it on the bus; there are pictures in the back of great big houses, some by a river and castles. What I do is slowly cutting round the edge, houses, flowers, the countryside and of course women. I've filled the notice board Gloria had put up for me, so now I stick them on the wall as well. I used to come back and find some of them, tidied into the bin. Now they've stopped worrying. I'm just working my way round the top of the window; nearly run out of wall, and Pritstick. I must remember to pocket one next time we have art.

But today I might lie on my bed with a breeze through the window and look at my mags. I'm lying on my bed, cutting them slowly out and around, pasting on a smear of white and getting up to put this one high next to Kylie, the wicked tart.

I can usually guess the time spot on; I could have been the talking clock. I once listened to it in the Centre office. Marleen was larking about on the phone imitating the voice and trying to sound posh - "At the third stroke, it'll be ten thirty two and ten seconds precisely, la-di-dah ..." I told her, "I could have saved you the call." She laughed, "Tony, what don't you know?"

A bit of sun today so I'll pull back the curtains, not too hard, otherwise the rail will be down on my head again like it did last month, a Tuesday, - it must have been the twelfth. Graham was duty manager and he got a bit steamed up when I told him, but not much, because I've been here longer than any of them, since my mum found it was getting too much for her. I'd only been here for a year and then she upped and died, without me. Don't talk about it.

I've been reading about black holes; not sure if I believe in them, or not. Sometimes I lie awake at night with the curtains open and let my eyes wander, looking for them. Perhaps there's too many street lights round here. Perhaps if I was by 'the converted barn' in the mag, I'd get a hint of them being up there, like it said.

I'm always just getting into reading about black holes in *The Mysteries of Science* in the day room or a Buddy Holly story, when Jenny or Hasan have a fit or start screaming. Those two, I think they fancy each other; they just have a funny way of showing it. Mind you when Jenny does fit, you know all about it. Gloria or Graham have to come and clear the furniture out of

the way of her legs thrashing about, and make sure she's no biting anything, like her tongue. Then it all goes quiet and she comes round and sleeps curled up on the sofa. "Don't forget to put that in her notes", I say to Gloria. She pretends to look annoyed at me, at least I think she's pretending. "Here, clever clogs Tony, why don't you do it?", she says, and stomps off back to her little office under the stairs.

So am I going to the Centre or not? Guess I will; I can always finish sticking tonight; well really I'll never finish sticking. There always be another mag. This wall is like my family album now - my mum had a proper one, in a book. I wanted that when she died. It had a picture of my dad in fireman's uniform; I never saw him for real. He'd gone by the time I could remember anything. But it did have my mum's wedding photos and all the relatives, most of them dead now or living somewhere else, most probably down Green Lane. I get a Christmas card from Aunty Glenda and I once had a visit from another one, can't remember who though now. Just before the funeral I went round to my mum's. I looked through the bay window and rang the bell; no one in. The place was empty.

Oh well I'll get my mac out of the cupboard, kiss Kylie goodbye on the you-know-where and be on my way. The 321 stops down the road and it takes me to the door of the Centre. Got my Oyster card? Yes ...

...

I walk home. Half way down Aster Road, a funny thing happens. I see a woman, she was about thirty, coming towards me. She stops to talk to another man in front of me; but I see him shrug her off. He doesn't want to talk to her.

"Can you spare some change for a cup of tea?" she says to me. She's standing blocking the path. She looks, well, dirty and washed out, as though she could do with a good scrub and a meal. What's she doing here in Aster Road at three thirty five in the afternoon? She makes me feel edgy. I avoid looking in her face; but she keeps on at me.

I always keep my money in a purse in my left pocket.

"You're not going to get a cup of tea round here", I say.

"Whatever", she says, "Give us a quid or two; I really need it. You've got a kind face; what's your name?"

"Tony."

"Well, Tony. Give us some money and I'll be nice to you."

"Don't need anyone to be nice to me, thanks. I'm nice enough as I am."

I'm not walking down Aster Road again; I'll run a mile if I see her again.

...

I like a front seat in the mini-bus to see where you're going; today it's Southend. I've been there lots of times, before and since the fire. We'll not be on the pier today, not with a great hole in the middle of it. Roger's up the back sitting by John; his wheelchair is belted down. You might think John doesn't know what's going on, but I know different. He sits there, his helmet on and his heading rolling a bit, but when we get out and catch a bit of sea breeze, he'll wake up. He can get quite noisy, he's so excited.

Ali's the driver today. He's younger than me and wears a lot of jewellery, gold chains and things. He's got his baseball hat on backwards.

"Hey, Ali!"

"What's that, Tony?"

"People will think you're driving backwards."

"Why's that?"

"Your hat's on the wrong way round."

"Oh, Tony; give it a break." He glances back with a quick smile.

We find somewhere out of the breeze to look at the sea. It's miles out, just lots of mud and water somewhere you can hardly see. People walking up and down the front; a lot of old people. Kids should be at school.

Roger has brought a digital camera; I love them. He takes our picture, all five of us lined up in a shelter, plus the other staff. Then he asks me if I can take a picture with him in it too. You bet.

It's all silver and covered in buttons. He shows me the screen on the back, everybody jiggling around as I move the camera. He tells me about pressing the button and then nips off into the shelter by John. Half of them aren't looking, but they never will. The rest all shout cheese too soon; I'm still sorting out the camera.

"Hang on a minute. OK now, cheese, again!"

I hold it steady and press and bingo. Roger shows me how to see the picture on the screen and it looks OK, oh, but John's gone to sleep.

We're all starving. We always have fish and chips at Southend; it's a real treat. We go to the same place on the front where you can sit outside and have a coke and a plate of cod and chips and plenty of tomato ketchup, and – if you're lucky, it depends on whose taking you, finish off with a cream bun and a cup of tea. Or maybe we'll have that just before we go home, which won't be long because we have to be back by three thirty.

A woman on another table starts getting friendly with us.

I think it would be better if she stayed out of it, but she comes over and starts trying to talk to John in his wheelchair. John is looking down at the floor between his knees, waiting for the next forkful of fish and chips. He couldn't care a toss about anything else at the moment.

"Can I give you a hand? Here let me feed this one; what's he called?"

Roger says, "That's very kind of you, but no. We're all fine."

She looks a bit miffed, chats about the weather for a bit, pats John on the knee and gets up and is off. I see Roger swaps glances with Ali.

On the way back in the mini-bus Roger and Ali start a bit of a sing-song. I get them to sing some Buddy Holly favourites – 'Peggy Sue, Peggy Sue .....', and 'Not Fade Away'. Then we sing, 'That'll be the day ...' Roger knows them all, but Ali just tags along. I look round and John's not quite smiling but he's moving his head from side to side.

I walk home via the High Road and tell Graham all about the day; he's a bit busy filling in forms but he says he's glad we had a good time and maybe yes some time later we can sing 'Peggy Sue' together, but not just now.

I go to bed early because there's nothing on telly. I lie there thinking about the day. I wonder if a black hole is like the burnt-out bit in the middle of Southend pier.

Commentary on Tony's story

These excerpts of *Tony's story* have been through a process of editing which in itself casts some light on the complexity of trying to explore how I am relating to this *Tony*. I gave the complete story to Beverley, the Centre manager, to read. She reminded me of Mark Haddon's (2004) book, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, which is written in the first person from the imagined perspective an autistic boy.

I agreed with her that I had tackled a very complex job in trying to get inside the mind of an autistic person. She thought that although the incidents I had attributed to Tony have in her experience all happened or are credible as what might happen to this fictitious Tony, they were presented with too much reflexivity, too much awareness of other's reactions and responses. This forced me to take a closer and more critical look at the text. I also read Haddon's book and saw how far I still had to go in understanding the difference in how autistic people perceive other's words and actions. I was attributing too much causality to Tony's observations and comments. There was too much of *my* way of seeing things in Tony's monologue.

I was also struck by the extraordinary discipline of containing what I wanted to say within the limits of his imagined first person voice. This at a stroke removed the writer's reflexive voice that a third person account would have permitted.

Nevertheless I still felt that the exercise had allowed me to explore my relationship with Silver Street in a new way. The version which I have included above has been further stripped of what I took to be my voice which had inevitably crept in at every reflective moment. I have also removed some episodes which were high on pathos, incidents which showed Tony being exploited by the world. These I felt to be uncomfortably close to rendering his disability as an object of pity. I want to show him as worthy of respect.

Frank (1995) comments,

> **'To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyse it. Thinking with stories takes the story as already complete; there is no going beyond it. To think with a story is to experience it affecting one's own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one's life.' (Frank, 1995, p. 23)**

I am still thinking with *Tony*.

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with tracing how my understanding of the poetics in practice has developed. I firstly made clear that I was using the term *poetic* to describe a wider range of aesthetic process than that of poetry. I discussed the sense in which the poetic may be *used* in practice. With Bateson (1975), I would seek to avoid the 'human purposefulness' of using artworks and processes. Such use would involve a propositional stripping or translation of one form of meaning into another more functional one; as a consequence the poetics' essence would be destroyed. The quality of participative transactions that I associate with the poetic are more complex and serendipitous than this.

I referenced Bachelard (1958), Midgley, (2001), Huizinga (1938) and Linstead (2000) for their different perspectives on the distinctive presentational knowing that is achieved through the poetic.

Next I used two 'fleeting images' to illustrate and support this theoretical discussion. *Yannis by the bus stop* and *the Church noticeboard* were offered as examples of the intrinsic poetic in my first person inquiry into Silver Street.

The rest of the chapter was devoted to two topics, *negativity or the silent implicative double*, and *metaphor*. These were described as offering interpretative keys to the illusive nature of the poetic in practice. Linstead (2000) and Gadamer (1975) were referenced in a discussion

on negativity and the silent implicative double which lies around words and actions. Poetic texts render themselves more open than propositional ones, to inquiry into this negativity. This was explored through an analytic commentary on a journal entry entitled *Black Holes*.

Referencing Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, metaphor was explored as a complex and pervasive process for cognitive as well as sensory and aesthetic knowing.

The chapter concluded with references to the more expressive use of the poetic. The function of messy texts in autoethnographic inquiry was discussed. I then included an experimental piece of writing, 'Tony's story', through which I have tried to use first person fiction to explore how I relate to disability in the imaginary persona of Tony. I described how the editing of this piece of writing had stripped it of much of my imposed voice and is so doing I experienced a deepening in my understanding of autism, as well as a confirmation of my relating to the people I have met in Silver Street.

In the final chapter of Part C, which follows, I shall tie up the story of Silver Street-2, *Different Days*.

Working sketch – Nothing and something, 10/10/05

I notice more and more how themes that I have been researching in my practice find echoes in other parts of my life. This should come as no surprise and merely affirms what I stated early on in this inquiry that the notion of practice would itself become an artificial constraint, if limited to action research and expressive media.

I have come across two recent connections with the theme of negativity – firstly, Rachel Whiteread who has referred to her work as 'minimalism with heart'! As a parallel to the negativity of the unspoken, she has found a spatial medium to express what is not normally seen by the human eye. Whiteread's massive new work, Embankment' has today been opened in the turbine hall of the Tate Modern, 10/10/05. (My photo does little to capture the scale and impact of this work.)
She produced moulds of the insides or negatives of a collection of different shaped card boxes and these were then 'transposed' into positives in pure white plastic and assembled into a mountainous landscape through which visitors were free to walk.

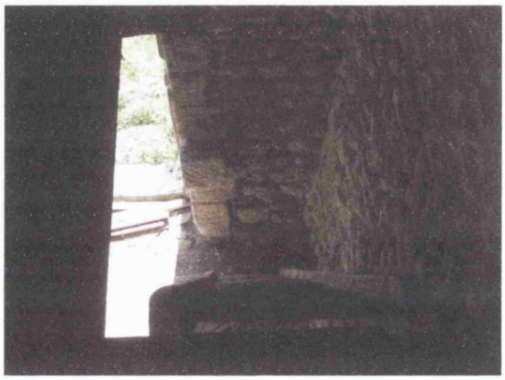
The second reference caught my eye when I was reading Lao Tzu (1963/D.C.Lau translation, [551 to 479 B.C.]).

Lau, in a note on his translation, suggests that 'nothingness' here means 'empty spaces'. I see a connection between this concept of nothingness and poetic negativity, both of which render what surrounds them meaningful.

Lao Tzu explores the concept in poem XI of this collection (Lao Tzu, trans. D.C. Lau, 1963) overleaf,

'Thirty spokes
Share one hub.
'Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand,
and you will have use of the cart.
Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand,
and you will have the use of the vessel.
Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to a
purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room.

'Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of
Nothing that can be put to use.'



12 Silver Street-2, Where has all this got us?

12 Silver Street-2, Where has all this got us?

Introduction

In this short final chapter in Part C, I conclude the account of Silver Street-2, in which I worked with front-line staff on a project entitled *Different Days*. This illustrates a further staging point in the development of my inquiry into the aesthetic in practice. I set out at the beginning of Part C to explore three main themes; these were – action research, play and the poetic. This last chapter brings these together in a story of the final day of this piece of work.

My aim in this chapter is to,

- demonstrate an integration of the themes of action research, play and the poetic
- assess where my inquiry has reached at this stage.

The story as I left it in Chapter 9 had concluded with Lucy's challenge, 'Where is all this getting us?', in the morning of Day 3 of this 5-day programme. The day concluded in the following way.

journal ... Trip to the park, 25/5/2004

Journal	Commentary
I found time over lunch to make notes about the dialogue with Ian, Lucy and Beverley. Then in the afternoon we set off on foot past an enormous cemetery to a local park. Ian had arranged a meeting between our group and a group run by MENCAP, to talk to Linda, the project manager, some of her staff and service users. We spotted them sitting on a large multi-coloured sheet on the grass. Others were in wheel chairs around the sheet. The mood was very relaxed in the afternoon sun. One woman was helped to lie down on her side.	This meeting place provided the MENCAP service users with a sunny excursion and, in some cases, a siesta; it also gave us a forum for a conversation with a staff from this voluntary sector provider of services.

She squirmed with pleasure turning to and fro in the sunlight. I found myself sitting by a young man called Ian, possibly in his early twenties, no speech but an inviting grin.

As he grips my hand, I realize how strong he is. He seems to have befriended me. We play a none too serious form of arm wrestling; if it turned serious, I know who would win, quite literally hands down.

This was not the only moment I felt I was in someone else's clutches at Silver Street, but I was more trusting of these physical contacts now.

There followed a useful discussion with Linda, the MENCAP manager, about person-centred planning. She explained that she has three sons, two of whom have learning disabilities. She has campaigned for wider opportunities for all people with learning disabilities. No barriers seem to be too great for her, or them. For example, some have abseiled down cliffs in wheel chairs and suitable modified harnesses.

This afternoon seemed an excellent example of the unpredictability and unfolding nature of this action research project. It was thanks to one of our inquiry group, Ian, that we had the opportunity to talk with this very experienced practitioner as we sat in the sun in the middle of a park. I reflected on how different it might have been in a more traditional course on people-centred planning where we may have by now been offered a set of guidelines for planning, implementing and evaluating person-centred planning. Both approaches have their place, though learning through informal dialogue and storytelling such as this was more rooted in reflection on live experience. The sensory vivacity of storytelling energised how we were learning. Her ambitions for service users were impressive.

Week 4

The group was by this time devising its own programme of inquiry within our agreed sequence of weekly sessions. It had been decided at the end of Week 3 that we would try to arrange a visit to a hostel. Since a significant number of people using the Centre live in hostels, this was a gap worth filling. I was surprised to discover that some of the participants had not made such a visit before. We needed this contribution to the imaginal picture we were creating about how service users live and what they need for a fuller life.

On the phone between Weeks 3 and 4, I discovered from Ian that a trip had been organized.

journal ... Week 4 – A hostel visit, 1/6/2004

Journal

Before setting off to visit the residential home, we talked briefly about what we might learn from making the visit. To get us there, Lloyd offered his vast Jaguar into which most of the group piled. I drove three others.

My expectation was that I might find the home institutional or grubby. In fact it was certainly not grubby and its institutional ethos was caring, communal living, nothing repressive or depressive, but still inevitably institutional. We were greeted by a spry and remarkably positive young woman who apologized that it was she, the administrator, who would be showing us round, not residential care workers, as they were all out.

So too were the service users, mainly at Silver Street. We were offered a brief glance into each person's room. One room belonging to a man had A1 sized posters of near naked women. We talked about the rights of residents to lead their own lives as they wished.

Our guide spoke with affection about the people who lived there. The Home arranges trips at the weekend. Lloyd questioned her about how they pay for transport and discovered that another part of the local authority was charging them, at a rate higher than a local taxi firm might charge.

Commentary

The young woman who showed us round was brimming over with energy and seemed to radiate appreciation of what the hostel offered and also of our interest in making the visit.

The quality of her positive presence with us as we went round the rooms impressed me. It was an influential process that transferred to the judgement I was forming about the quality of the care in this home. In a small but significant way this evidenced an aesthetic process of relationship out of which practical knowing springs. Because of her I was prepared to think better of the home.

He offered to look into this anomaly, not least because he knew that there were minibuses standing idle at the weekend. Why could they not be used?

I think of this home, an encapsulated world in a quiet urban street, the place without which lives would regress, unless people's families could find a way of managing. Others though have no families on which to call.

Stepping across the threshold into this separate world extends my sense of lives lived in parallel with mine, but in such different circumstances.

Thanking the few staff we had met, we made our way back to the Irish Community Centre. We talked over the impressions that the visit had made. People were surprised at the level of facilities and care that was evident.

Through the aesthetic of the visit, – the sights, smells, ambience of the hostel and the narrative of the person guiding us round, – I am re-storying what I understand about the lives of people with learning disabilities.

The afternoon was devoted to refining what pieces of inquiry/project work people could seriously engage with during the summer interval when we will not be meeting ...

We agreed that Ian's group would work on the topic of food, choosing it, cooking it, planning menus, and increasing choice. Lucy's group would tackle communications related mini-projects. Lloyd volunteered to look into ways of making it possible for places like the hostel we had visited today to get cheaper travel options for visits.

As I reflected further on this visit, I recalled a story that I included in my account in Chapter 6, of the meeting at the end of Silver Street-1. Stewart had described being left by himself, earlier in his long career, to run a hostel for four days with ten service users; not surprisingly this had left him in a state of near madness. (This would now have broken all regulations, probably then too.) His story was so full of pathos and despair, that I had carried it in my

mind as something which was likely to be happening in other hostels. This visit told a different and positive story. Reflecting on the action of our research visit on this morning gave us a chance to hold both possibilities in mind. We had become open to the process of discovering this home and a story had been re-imagined.

(I also detect a number of details and images that were later to surface in *Tony's story* in the previous chapter.)

There followed an interval of several weeks during the summer break before we met for our final day together.

journal ... Front-line Week 5, 14/9/2004

Journal

I drove down to the Irish Centre after this interval, taking with me some white roses from the garden as I knew we were being put back into the pokey ill-equipped room we had started in. There was some major security alert in the district. Roads were shut off and a police helicopter passed overhead.

The group seemed pleased to be together again and any anxiety I might have about how far we had progressed soon melted away when they started talking about their pieces of work. Lloyd had turned his transport exercise into a well-presented report with photos, charts and recommendations. Lucy spoke at some length about the labelled pictures she had collected and used with a service user who has limited spoken language. She had discovered that staff and carers had underestimated what the person could say. Lucy was delighted to discover that there was a wider vocabulary there, a new channel of communication. Ian smiled in a resigned way at his having not been able to retrieve in time from Boots the photos he had taken of cooking sessions.

Commentary

I wondered how well the momentum of the programme had been maintained during the summer break.

This anxiety told me that there was still some residual clutching at my old role of trainer. Within the framing of collaborative inquiry, if today did not go well it would be down to all of us, not just me.

I had found a chapter in Winter (2001) that was written by a person occupying a similar role to that of the Silver Street manager, Beverley. It described an action research project to achieve 'a more client-centred approach to serving the needs of people with profound learning disabilities'. We read through extracts of it together.

At 11 am Beverley, the service manager, and three manager colleagues arrived. I suggested that we divide the session into:

- a showing and talking about people's work during the programme
- a more general discussion of what managers hoped to achieve through the *Different Days* action plan and how staff felt able to respond and participate.

The first part of the session went very well. Beverley, the manager, responded warmly and positively to what she heard. She asked people to say how being on the programme had helped them learn. They talked about the challenge of thinking again about service users' needs and the opportunity to learn from each other. Lucy spontaneously rehearsed the moment when she had challenged our process in Week 3 and explained how she had then realised that this was a different kind of learning from a taught course. As they talked I turned over in my mind how to run the second half of the morning. I feared that without a structure, it might still just have the potential to develop into managers explaining or defending the plan and staff saying how it wouldn't work.

I had brought a roll of kitchen foil with me, (a material that Deborah Jones at Bath had used so successfully with our group). I asked people if they were up for a game. "As long as it's not a role play", chipped in Beverley, the service manager.

There was a strong sense of rehearsal for a performance about the first half of the morning. Agonistic play was shaping up around the question of how the visiting group of managers would judge what they found.

I split the group into two sub-groups, and asked two managers to join each.

I gave each sub-group a six-foot length of foil and asked them to use it to model how they would like the Day Opportunities Service to look in four years' time. One group settled on the floor and the other round the table and there was an agreeable hubbub.

In the talk that followed I was impressed by the group's level of engagement with re-shaping the existing service into something radically different. The combination of the managers' presence and the creative activity of the foil brought out the energies and visions of a number of people.

The group containing Beverley, Ian and five others had considered throwing the foil away as a gesture to demonstrate that the day opportunities service might no longer be there visibly because it would have been absorbed into the community. Instead they made a small structure in foil that was a contact point where users and staff would drop in during the day. Everything else was out in various networks, voluntary agencies and services in the community. The second group had replaced the centre by a mobile headquarters in the shape of bus.

In the conversation that ran up to lunch Beverley said she didn't think her current role would still exist. Others spoke about a service that might be managed flexibly in the community using mobile phones and the Internet.

Yet again I am struck by how minimal an intervention it takes to switch the flow of play. If we had all sat round and had a discussion about the future, ideas would have been developed in a linear counterpoint of contributions. The silver foil exercise in two parallel groups was a playful alternative that engaged everyone simultaneously in inventing the future.

By this stage there was a definite sense of Ilinx as the lunch became a sort of end of term party.

This expressive modelling activity made people's commitment and energy clear to others. The symbolic use of a material as 'anonymous' as silver foil, liberated a lot of playful

inventiveness. By initially freeing people from the constraint of sequential comments, ideas could surface and be developed in a more fluid way.

What I learned in the completion of this action research project

In reflecting further on this account of the final day in this project, two themes emerge, firstly, the value of the model-making process that Barry (1994) refers to as making the invisible visible. Secondly, I want to reflect on where I and the group stood in discovering what it meant to work through a cooperative inquiry.

Model-making

I found it remarkable how articulate the models were in expressing the difference we had been exploring in this *Different Days* action inquiry. Not only did the activity reveal more concrete imaging of how the service might be, than had surfaced in earlier discussion; but it also provided an indication of the emotional energy that people were feeling about these changes. They enjoyed the inventiveness of their model-making.

Barry's (1994) description and analysis of model-making in consulting assignments has already been referred to in Chapter 8, *The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice.* In analysing his practice with a group of military officers, Barry refers to the psychophysical patterns in symbolic inquiry such as defensiveness, denial and energetic shifts in mood and energy.

This Silver Street group had worked through earlier mood swings and had the benefit of collaboration over five days. Some detectable defensiveness came in their manager's mildly distancing comment before we started about not wanting to do role-play. It was also her group who playfully considered rolling up the foil into a ball and throwing it away.

Her arrival in the established group may well have energised them to show themselves at their best and in so doing repress any ongoing pessimism about the feasibility of change. (Even as I write this now though, I doubt whether the new power dynamic of the manager's presence would have held them back much; they have a respectful but open relationship with her.)

Drawing on the work of Schaverien (1987), Barry argues that symbolic inquiry can be seen as a process of transference.

> **'it is the temporary transference of a client's hidden feelings and beliefs to the creation that gives the process its power; the construction becomes a "positive scapegoat." Unlike**

> **the conventional therapist/client relationship, where the client projects wish states almost exclusively onto the therapist, symbolic inquiry leaves the consultant in a relatively neutral position.' (Barry, 1994, p. 5)**

(This valuable distinction between therapy and symbolic inquiry connects with my earlier reflection in Chapter 8, *The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice*, on exchanging WB Yeats poems with a participant as we drove home from an away-day. There, self-reflection on some personal issues in the participant's life, was made possible through a sense of permission set up by our shared poetic inquiry.)

The discussion which followed this modelling session was focused and energetic. The small vehicles and contact points that they made, had acquired a level of imaginative presence in our thinking about the future service.

Barry endorses Schaverien's view that if the symbolic transference is substantive it will move from the 'diagrammatic' or illustrative stage, to the embodied in which the construction represents deeper and stronger emotion and then to the talismanic stage where the creation seems to acquire a life of its own.

When the activity was over, the models were rolled into balls. No one made a bid to take them back to the centre. Their embodying of people's aspirations was complete and the image of a more community based and dispersed service was in people's minds.

Action research

On this final morning I had experienced more clearly than before what the process and facilitation of action research could be like. Whilst I had played a crucial role in shaping the activity it was the group's insights and dialogue which brought it alive.

I thought back to the opening play of resistance in Week 1. Together we had now glimpsed how service users might be better served in flexible and responsive ways that more closely resemble a normal family- and/or community-based life. We knew it would not be easy to move in this direction, but through our collaborative action research people had found a more shared language and started to re-vision future possibilities. I hoped it would enable them to work more collaboratively when facing inevitable future setbacks and obstacles. I hoped also I might have the opportunity to follow this through with further connection with Silver Street. This was to be the case as I was subsequently asked to facilitate the third project that I describe in Part D.

Conclusion

This completes my account of the second stage of significant involvement in Silver Street as a research environment. During this period I learned about a paradox of action research facilitation, through which I discovered that *less* leads to *more*. By not stepping in and speaking into the silence, by not accepting that the group passed all decisions back to me, I discovered that inventiveness and openness flourished. By holding firmly to the principle of collaborative learning, I witnessed how people can grow into an active learning group capable of managing its own process.

The aesthetic of this programme lay for me in the subtle development of relationships, ideas and feelings that the group experienced and in their growing capacity to represent them to each other. It was manifest in the dialogue particularly around what was to be learnt and how it might be learnt. There was also a delightful quality of improvisation on the basic theme, as we found ways of shaping the content of the days to meet our objectives.

In describing the visit to Mencap in the afternoon of Week 3 and the hostel visit in Week 4 I noticed the narrative and poetic impact that they had on the main *Different Days* inquiry theme of this project. Through reflection on this storytelling and the aesthetic context in which the stories were told, we were able to fill in further parts of re-imagined picture of the lives of people with learning disabilities.

I concluded by giving an account of the last session when the Centre managers joined participants in a review of what had been learnt. This morning was characterised by playfulness and the use of symbolic inquiry in two parallel model-making activities. By reference to Barry (1994), a distinction between person-to-person therapy and symbolic inquiry was recognised.

The third and final account of work in Silver Street will be presented in the Part D. In this project with staff and people with moderate learning disabilities I will show how we inquired into creating work and training opportunities for a group of ten service users. It was in this final programme that we had the opportunity get even closer to an understanding of the needs and wishes of people attending the Centre. Key dimensions of this third piece of inquiry were the inclusion of people with moderate learning disabilities in the inquiry group and the introduction of creative media into the process.

Interlude – Part C to Part D

In Part C, *Action Research, Play and Practice*, the focus on these three areas has been deepened by a fuller account of the literature and also through commentary on my journal describing Silver Street-2, a cooperative inquiry with front line staff.

In Part D, *Making a Difference*, I now draw together the main themes of difference that being and working in this way make for others, as well as for myself.

The act of writing this thesis has been one of self-discovery and re-discovery. I have lived over an extended period with the discipline of expression and reflection, as thesis drafts have shifted and changed like tectonic plates. Now I feel a resolution of the sense of separation between my own aesthetic life and the work of the last twenty years or so. Play and poetics were there to be re-discovered as transformative processes in every encounter. Through participation with Silver Street I have also discovered the value of expressive aesthetics in the re-storying of experience for greater human flourishing.

The writing in this Part is arranged in the following way.

Chapter 13, The News of Difference in Silver Street-3
Re-connecting with Bateson and his concept of the news of difference, I offer a commentary on the differences from which learning sprang in this, the last of the three Silver Street projects. Its purpose was to develop work and training opportunities for people with learning difficulties; their inclusion as very active participants in this cooperative inquiry had a significant influence on the intrinsic aesthetic of our sessions as well as our purpose and direction in inquiring together.

Another feature of Silver Street-3 was the integration of expressive media throughout, as participants used a variety of art-based methods to record and learn from their work.

Rather than tell the story sequentially I have chosen journal extracts in the form of a fieldbook and arranged them to address and draw together the main themes of the thesis. They are grouped under the following headings, – the intrinsic aesthetic, the expressive aesthetic, poetic artefacts, play and friendship, and action research.

Chapter 14, Conclusion and coda

I introduce this final chapter to the thesis, on a note of aspirations and dreams. The group in Silver Street-3 had declared their dreams for future employment. I see the list that they produced as a metaphor for all aspirations for change and difference in lives, including my own.

I examine the main dimensions of change in perspective and practice that result from greater attunement to the aesthetic. I do this by referencing writers who have most profoundly influenced my understanding of the difference that working within this epistemological framework makes to living and working.

I consider in what ways I have experienced aesthetic process in cooperative practice as transformative. Then following Gadamer (1975) I explore the notion of the temporality of the aesthetic and the way in which we are given back more of ourselves in self-forgetful participation. Referencing Midgley (2001) and Rorty (1989), I consider how through the use of the imagination we envisage and enact change. Poetry and other of expressive aesthetic forms are seen, in Rich's words (2006), as ways of re-discovering 'a future forgotten'.

A short coda concludes the chapter; in it I dream about my future life and practice.

Part D

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

13 The News of Difference in Silver Street-3

13 The news of difference in Silver Street-3

Introduction

Using Bateson's term, *The news of difference*, signals an important purpose in this and the final chapter that make up Part D. As Bateson points out,

> **'Difference which occurs across time we call change.' (Bateson, 1972, p. 458)**

At this significant staging point in the journey, I shall reflect on a changing practice and draw together the principal strands of what has been learnt during the course of this research.

The news of difference that I shall be exploring relates both to the first person inquiry and the parallel second person inquiries I have been pursuing in this thesis. My main first person inquiry continues to be into the aesthetic and the differences that a deeper awareness of play and the poetic has led to in my practice. In parallel, a final project, Silver Street-3, provides material in this chapter for a review of the major themes that have featured in previous Parts.

I therefore aim to,

- use the third Silver Street project as a resource or fieldbook to draw together the main strands of my inquiry
- evaluate the contribution this makes to an understanding of the aesthetic in practice.

Silver Street-3 was focused on helping the Centre meet aspirations to increase work and training opportunities for service users. It was a cooperative inquiry over four separate days involving staff and people with moderate learning difficulties.

In Batesonian terms, as differences occur through interactions, 'mind', which links this small community to my practice, changes and learns. My task here is to notice, reflect on and make sense of the differences that led to learning for me and for them in this project and the three years of practice that preceded it.

I intend to use material from this cooperative inquiry to describe the main news of difference, but in doing so I shall present it differently, breaking up the original linear account in my journal into fragments. Within each fragment I expect to find holographic elements of the whole picture of the aesthetic in practice that has been constructed through this inquiry. (Maybe this is exposing the inquiry to something of Marinetti's futurist manifesto described in Chapter 2. When disassembled, what do the pieces still say?)

Since I will not be writing a linear record of this project, I now offer instead a brief account of its purpose and how it was designed.

The context of Silver Street-3, *The people work here*

This final project's purpose was to support the establishment of a new initiative for Silver Street, an Employment and Training Service (ETS) for people with learning disabilities. It took place in October and November, 2004. It was agreed between the service manager and myself that it would be conducted as a cooperative inquiry.

In framing this piece of work at Silver Street I decided from the outset that it should involve people with learning disabilities as well as the staff who were grappling with defining and implementing 'person-centred planning'. It would have been ironic to set off on an initiative designed to enhance person-centred planning without involving the people who were intended to benefit from it.

This decision to work with 'the whole system in the room' (Pratt, Plamping and Gordon, 1999) was very much in tune with the democratic stance of action research. The voice of everyone who has a stake in the inquiry needed to be heard. The challenge in this case was to find a way of working which was more fully participative whilst at the same time respecting the differing needs of everyone present.

My journal writing continued as before. The journal was made available week by week to everyone in the ETS centre. I also now had to find a conversational way of recounting sections of what I had written, for those who could not read.

As the programme progressed, the project offered an opportunity for me to experience the integration of many areas of practice that I had explored in Silver Street-1 and -2. There was more play in these sessions than I had experienced in most other practice assignments; play

became our preferred way of learning. The activities were very practical and supported by comprehensive audiovisual record keeping. This provided people with some external account of what had been achieved and of their role in achieving it. There were also moments of great poetic poignancy, particularly around the quieter margins of activities.

Expressive aesthetic activities will be shown to be woven into the fabric of the programme. The issue of how best to integrate this type of activity has attracted my attention at regular intervals earlier in the thesis. I recognize the need to respect the aesthetic tastes and expectations of the group, when choosing to introduce such activities. Expressive activities form a regular part of service users' day-to-day experience. Here in Silver Street-3, picture taking, drawing, painting, modelling and video were essential to the recording and reflective process of inquiry. People welcomed the chance to participate. It was hard to imagine any other way of proceeding. Making statements and images in this way helped people imagine and visualise what work would be like for them and what would be needed to find some.

At the core of these days, dialogue held us together in a series of assemblies and departures, often in a large group circle but also in small groups on visits or art-based activities. In the brief span of the programme there was a quality of living together. Sometimes this was boisterous – there was a lot of playful banter. People often shared what else was going on in their lives. There were shopping trips, quiet times just sitting chatting at midday – many of the things friends do together.

This ethos of friendly and purposeful being-together constituted an important part of the intrinsic aesthetic of this cooperative inquiry group. It can also be seen as an embodiment of the action research principle of aiming to achieve a balance between hierarchy, cooperation and autonomy, or as Heron (1989) puts it '**deciding for others, with others and for oneself**'. (See Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework*, for an earlier discussion of this.)

The direct and outgoing nature of the service-users was their contribution, an expression of their autonomy. They did what they liked doing; they mostly enjoyed each other's company and the sense of adventuring into something different. In this they were also a cooperative group. The facilitation, mine and that of the art-worker who supported expressive work, contributed hierarchically by creating an aesthetic framework which made the programme possible and shaped it in particular. This will be best illustrated from selected 'fragments' in

what follows. However at this stage I want simply to note that we all contributed to the potential for an appreciative, friendly and purposeful aesthetic.

A Silver Street-3 fieldbook

The main body of this chapter takes the form of a fieldbook of journal fragments and commentary. They have been selected for what they say about the aesthetic in practice. I have assigned them to headings and arranged them in the following order,

- the intrinsic aesthetic
- the expressive aesthetic
- poetic artefacts
- play and friendship
- action research.

These journal fragments will vary in length but in each case I have asked myself in what ways they contribute a deeper understanding of the aesthetic in a practice based on an action research approach.

The intrinsic aesthetic

In Chapter 7 I inquired into the intrinsic aesthetic of practice in Silver Street, perhaps the most memorable moment for me being the painting of nails, although there were many others.

Here I consider two pieces of dialogue that I had with members of this cooperative inquiry group, firstly Sharon, then with Chris, a member of staff.

Journal	Commentary
Sharon – be happy While we are still assembling, Sharon speaks quietly to me about the meaning of today for her. I was holding my mini-disc and asked her if I could record what we were saying to each other. She agreed. The fragments of sound that run through the recording have a	

potency which will be – lost in translation – ordinary words, beautiful words. She told me that today was her mother's birthday ... But then she said, "My mother's in heaven ... in the clouds", a mantra that wards off the incomprehensibility of mourning and loss. "No more crying ... no more misery. (Longer pause) We all die one day ... Be happy ... No more crying ... Be happy.'

I am thrown and moved by this. I hear myself on the disc adding inept words, "Lovely ... a lovely message". Lovely message? – this is the language of my own mother also long since dead but now I intuitively find her voice rising in me again. Between us, Sharon and I hold mortality lightly at bay for a moment or two.

I ask her if I can stop to check the recording. "'Course you can", she says in a matter of a fact way.

...

Snippets of news filter through from others, as we sit down to start the day. George explains that he was not here last week because he went to Madame Tussaud's and saw many waxworks including Kylie Minogue. Keith had arrived with the edited video and Stuart had produced a set of colour photos from last week's visit to the 357 Centre.

I am guessing that the litany she rehearsed for me had been learnt from relatives as a way of coming to terms with her bereavement. It had its own rhythm, a breath between each phrase.

In writing about it, it becomes a trigger to an imaginative re-storying of my own loss of a mother. At the time I noticed my mother's voice in the formulaic response, 'a lovely message'; that would have been her comment. (My father offered newcomers at church a 'cordial welcome' during his Sunday service announcements.)

I am mirroring Sharon's resort to the safety of clichés, which at moments like these carry an enormous silent implicative double of inexpressible feeling.

I retained the tail end of the Sharon journal item because it reminds me how Sharon's quiet exchange occurred in the middle of the incoming group as it milled around. (I have just noticed too where I got the Kylie Minogue reference that I included in Tony's story in Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice*. Elements of George and Tony have merged in the telling. This illustrates for me the largely unnoticed way in which aesthetic connections occur in the imagination and how sensory triggers re-evoke them in ways which lie beyond logic.)

Journal

Talking to Chris in the kitchen, we get on to thinking about the reaction that people with learning disabilities elicit from people. I had been reflecting on why I have been drawn to finding out more about their lives. I am very conscious that I get great satisfaction from my visits and will go on writing further about the significance of these relationships for me. Chris says that when he first came into contact with people with learning disabilities he caught this sense of the special quality of connection by thinking of them as 'angels'; I took from this it was something about their fundamental innocence and openness. They do seem to bring out the best in us, and sadly on occasions with exploitative people, the worst.

Commentary

References to Chris feature several times in these fragments. I felt sometimes that I was talking to a part of me that I recognized in Chris, like a form of mimetic echo, another way of defining connection and friendship. It is as though in him I have identified a re-imagined me, an affinity. Some of what I notice in him lies beyond me, for example, the radical politics, which I can align myself with in my heart but not in my head or my actions.

But the crossbar of his bike is emblazoned with the message, 'Another car off the road'; this becomes a post-hoc endorsement for my own decision to walk, rather than drive the two miles to and from the station, every time I have travelled to London for the last three years

Again the word 'angels' had a remarkable negativity about it. We did not need to *talk it out* into full detail. I knew what he meant because I have noticed the attention to the quality of service users he brings to his work. His word was contingent with his action.

I have included these examples under the heading of the intrinsic aesthetic because they are heightened dialogic interactions that alter and reconnect relationships. Neither conversation leaves Sharon, Chris or me in the same place. If I speak from my perspective, both Sharon and Chris, through their confiding to me of personal and important news of the differences in their lives, have become closer to me. Our interaction in the large group now carries with it this extra knowledge. My aesthetic knowing of being in this group has evolved; I am

changed by my appreciation of their trust. As I have changed in this way, this too ripples back into the improvised creation of the life of this group.

As holographic fragments Sharon and Chris' stories could as well illustrate the poetic in practice. Although textually sparse, they had an intrinsic quality of poetic drama of the sort described in the journal entry *Tony's story* in Chapter 11, *Poetics in Practice*. They also have something to say about facilitation approaches; there needs to be space in programmes for moments at the margins to happen, like this. I need to be receptive to the possibility of their arriving. This means noticing them as they occur, which in turn means avoiding becoming too blinkered by the need to 'manage' what is happening.

I see them as examples of the learning which happens at the interfaces, (Bateson, 1972); I discussed and illustrated this phenomenon in relation to the moss and paving stone photo in Chapter 3, *A theoretical framework.* In this case the interfaces often occurred on arriving and leaving or between sessions in the programme.

Teresa's declaration described in Chapter 6, *How does working in this way influence others?*, about her reason for working with people with profound learning disabilities, falls into the same category, coming as it did in the closing moments of our meeting. Kuldip, the Asian women worker, shown in my photo of Lorraine in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*, told me later in passing that for her, Lorraine and others she cares for might as well be members of her family.

The expressive aesthetic

In this section I examine the introduction of expressive activities into this project. I reflect on methodological issues about how this was done, as well as consider some epistemological issues about the different ways of experiencing and knowing that I noticed occurring.

Journal – The artist and action research	**Commentary**
Keith, of Artscope, has brought boxes of kit and art materials. I wanted him to join me in this piece of work, as I had already seen the art that service users do with him,	The process of recording activities in this project made the programme possible; without the cameras and art materials we would have been unable to move the distant and abstract into the present and the concrete.

some of whom are profoundly disabled. In our preparatory discussions he had made a strong case for not over-prescribing people's understanding of 'work' and the process of getting work. Let us start from their perspective. He also wants to loosen up the allocation of media; they should decide which they want to work with.

Keith's preparation of this session is thorough and so we had no confused scramble. He had an unfussy attitude to the technology. If someone recorded everything upside down, so be it. That might be interesting in itself. A heavy bit of instruction would have soon killed off interest.

I like Keith's sense of serendipity and readiness to accept whatever statements people make with the cameras and materials. This was very much in the spirit of our inquiry. It seemed the artist and the facilitator of action research are epistemological partners.

The whole event was also documented through my shared journal. People got a great sense of play in the mimesis of making and seeing their own images and artefacts. There was more laughter per minute than with most groups I work with.

I connect this with the process of making the invisible visible, which Barry (1994) describes in his discussion of model-making. (See Chapter 8, *The expressive aesthetic in practice*.)

Perhaps the heuristic use of art in this project can be seen as a metaphor for the expressive process in all interactions. Dialogue, for example, explores facets of the unsayable in the group through the poetics and play of being together. (I used to think that the 'unsayable' referred to the 'unspeakable', that is, something too terrible to utter. I now see any inquiry as a heuristic process of finding and bringing to the surface, meanings that the group is ready to share, some of which may of course be very hard to utter.)

Expressive activities have this capacity of enabling an exploration of the implicate silent double of encounters through symbolic representation, a concept I explored when referencing Linstead (2000) in Chapter 11, *Poetics in practice*.

The following item describes some of the early take-up of this invitation.

Journal – Show and tell

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In the afternoon we took time to see the material that people had produced in the morning, with the exception of the video, which Keith had taken away to do some preliminary editing on.

I notice how important it was to spend long enough to see and value what people had done. So we looked at the Polaroid photos, which included shots of the local FE college entrance with members of the group who attend, standing by it. There was a shot of some notes and coins on a chair, as a reminder that some work results in payment. Ian's group also took photos of a hairdresser's shop window, which displayed a list of all the different services they provide. There were pictures of Green Peppers Cafe, which is staffed by people with learning disabilities. We saw Zahid's clay sentence laid out on a tray. We listened to Stuart's group's recording of their conversation at a recruitment agency.

All the material was collected and stored so that we can come back to it in later weeks.

Commentary

Art materials and tools, such as Polaroid cameras, dictaphones and video, had been essential channels for learning in the group.

They gave a focus and a stimulus for activity; in turn the artefacts which had been produced, generated an immediate resource for reflection.

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The use of the local community environment outside the single storey building in which ETS is based, added another stimulus to the generation of ideas in the group.

This item raises an interesting question about the more general use of expressive media in other inquiries. Did it work so well in this project because of the special needs of people with learning disabilities? On the one hand the Silver Street group were pre-disposed to this way of working through regular creative experience in Artscope. Setting that aside for a moment, what does this journal item say about the process of using photos, video, art and writing as part of the reflexive process of any group? There seem to be a number of potential benefits.

These creative processes in themselves generate for many, if not all, a sense of pleasure; they may re-awaken ways of exploring and making which are largely unrequired or suppressed in most work and social environments.

As has been pointed out at intervals throughout this thesis, the introduction of these alternative ways of inquiry needs to be handled sensitively by offering ways back into behaviours which once came naturally to most people in their early childhood. 'Adult' responses to the invitation to 'play' with expressive activities often include some resistance or denial. Barry (1994) notes such initial responses amongst some of the military personnel with whom he ran a model-making activity. It is only when the whole group begins to experience the symbolic meaning of the exercise that they engage more directly with the model-making.

These forms of expression need to find an appropriately adult renaissance, by being used in ways that are contingent with the intrinsic aesthetic of the group. This becomes evident through the play and poetics of what has happened so far in any particular session. Choosing a certain type of activity based on the facilitator's cultural preconceptions about the group might turn out to be wide of the mark.

A large part of this contingency therefore depends of the evolving relationship between the group and the facilitator, from which this intrinsic aesthetic has sprung. Through pursuing this inquiry I now find myself asking, 'Have I created an expectation that we might work in this way by using short expressive warm-up activities?' and, 'Is there sufficient mutual trust to contain any risks in the levels of self-exposure that expressive activities might lead to?' This is the particular contribution that sensitive facilitation can make in helping people take manageable steps towards a re-discovery of this wider aesthetic bandwidth. This becomes more feasible and accessible once they experience the symbolic connection between what they are making or doing, and the issues that they consider worth inquiring into.

At this stage, as Barry (1994) points out, the activity is pursued with new energy. In the case I describe in Chapter 8, *The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice*, when running a session with education staff, I was aware of the importance of not colluding unduly with the early stage of resistance, by attending to the models as they appeared, rather than any diversionary expressions of denial. Also once the models were made, their potential for uncovering feelings and assumptions about work and relationships needed to be explored through the models, not through any initial judgemental interpretation of them by anyone in the group. By focusing on what the artwork is saying to individuals and to the group, participants engage in a shared reflexive inquiry. The facilitator's principal role is to address the way this is being done.

As the examples included in Chapter 8, *The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice*, and elsewhere in discussions on the expressive dimensions of play and poetics show, the process of making artefacts and other forms of expressive process such as storytelling and acting, open up new ways of knowing. Rorty points out,

> **'Human solidarity ... is to be achieved not by inquiry but by imagination, the imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers. This process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like. This is a task not for theory but for genres such as ethnography, the journalist's report ... and especially the novel. ... The novel, the movie and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles for moral change and progress. In my liberal utopia this replacement ... would be part of a general turn against theory and toward narrative.' (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi)**

The next extract overleaf moves this review of the poetic functions of artefacts on to a consideration of how they become evocations, often with strong mimetic qualities.

Journal – Video image

We start with a recap and news session and then move on to watch the video that Keith has edited for us. My attention is torn between watching the screen - the video is good and captures the work and conversation that have gone on - and observing the reaction of the people on the screen. I am sitting next to Tulay and she shrieks with laughter and covers her face with her hands when she sees herself. She only dares to peep round her fingers at intervals, which sparks off another peel of laughter. "Hot", she says to me and I fan her face with my folder.

Commentary

Expressive artefacts made by the group become part of the aesthetic cycle of inquiry as they were in turn experienced and discussed.

Tulay reminded me how personal and powerful a process this can be. Seeing herself on the screen made her 'hot'.

I take from this the need for a sensitivity on the part of the facilitator in handling these moments. (I was made aware of this in my own relating to my image in the group's video.). I take this to be a sign of the potency of the expressive process. Something important is going on in relating inner consciousness of self to that which is reflected through artefacts; this needs to be respected.

I discussed earlier this exploration of identity in the episode with Venetia in Chapter 6, *How does working in this way influence others?*, as I caught sight of a reflection of the two of us in a shop window. A meta-layer of this image, – my awareness of the observing eyes of passers-by, – also blended into my imaginative co-construction of this brief relationship. All this, and more, was combined in a second's perception of an external image, glimpsed differently by Venetia and me. Our differing perceptions of the phenomenon of this moment are all embedded in the image reflected in the window, another manifestation of Gerald Manley Hopkins' rainbow, (see the working sketch at the end of Chapter 3, *A Theoretical Framework*.)

Although this shop window image was an intrinsic 'gift' rather than an expressive artefact, the process of re-imagining that follows, becomes expressive. In such re-imaginings change occurs; the news of difference becomes embodied in new learning. Its further expressive processing is occurring now as I try to capture in writing some of the consequences of my knowing in this moment.

In this final expressive example, I notice how easy it is to constrain expression, that of others as well as my own, by too much framing.

Journal – Let people be

We put the drawings people have made up on the window with blu-tak, much as you might see them in a primary classroom. I notice Yvonne has completed two drawings, one a bright, neat colouring-in of an outline that she had asked one of us to give her. Then she had produced a delightful freehand bunch of flowers, which looked as though they were not too long out of a real garden.

Commentary

This speaks of the subtle balance between offering a framework for others' inquiries and standing back to allow them to take their course. The drawings become a metaphor for the larger relationship between facilitators and groups. In the urge to shape things to achieve an agenda, how many flowers die in the vase?

I relate this to the account of working with Lucy given in Chapter 10, *Play in Practice*, where leaving space following her intervention, allowed a new dialogue to open up.

Poetic artefacts

Most of the artefacts described in this project were constructed by the participants. As a way of priming this process however, I had introduced some visual materials, an example of what I described as an *evocative* process, in Chapter 8, *The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice*. I describe this briefly in the following excerpt and notice the consequence of working with artefacts which are multi-voiced and 'messy'. If facilitation is fully directed towards an engagement with the artefact, whatever meaning is generated is part of the inquiry.

Journal – Expect the unexpected

I introduced the reason for our being here by circulating photos of people working; I had cut these out of magazines the night before. I realized at the time that without these pictures our sounding out of what we were going to do together would have been very difficult.

People also got excited about all sorts of other aspects to the imagery in these pictures – cars, food, whatever interested them ….

Commentary

There was a delightful 'surplus signification', (Carter and Jackson, 2000) about these pictures; people were seeing things in them that did not tie into my purpose in showing them! We did though begin to identify something of the range of activities which we might call work.

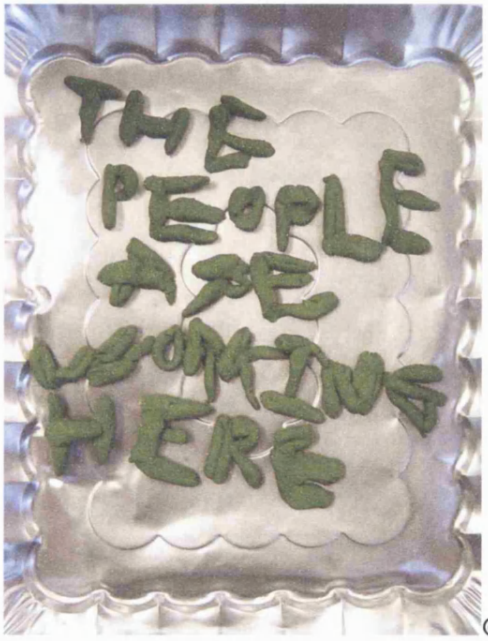
This for me points up the loose connection between my intention in working with what in Chapter 8 I called evocative aesthetics processes, such responses to *objets trouvés*, or magazine photos in this example, and what actually claimed the attention of the people in the group.

I take from this the need to anticipate as far as possible where an activity might lead and not leave it unduly open to confusing and dispersed responses. On the other hand I am equally alert to the need not to force too narrow a focus on inquiry, as this will exclude the unexpected. Cooperative inquiry is about what interests and motivates the group.

Overleaf I include the first example of an artwork made by Zahid, a member of the group.

Journal – 'The people work here'

I sit with Chris and the two service users who were with him, George and Zahid. A relaxed conversation unfolded between us. Zahid reflects on each question he is asked and then the answer comes out after an interval in a clear but very brief response. As he talks and listens to the conversation he is busy rolling out long thin coils of clay and then starts making them into letters. Slowly a word, then a sentence appears,



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Commentary

I found this record of Zahid's work beautiful. It set me thinking of,

- Tracey Emin's embroideries, with their snatches of dialogue stitched into quilted cloth, (seen recently [2006] at the White Cube Gallery),
- Howard Hodgkin's inclusion of the frame as part of the picture,
- a thousand and one references to wild typography in adverts and posters.

This is part of what the picture of Zahid's work gives me.

Zahid was visible pleased by the spontaneous acclaim he got from us and the rest of the group.

The meanings of the picture resided between it and each of those of us sitting round the table. It acquired an independent iconic existence for us; the words on the tray were kept safely throughout the project.

My reading of this image as I have recorded it above springs from my first person inquiry into the aesthetic in practice. Is the link with Emin and Hodgkin at risk of over-claiming, making Zahid's statement into more than it is?

My answer is, no. It is not that my associations with Emin and Hodgkin legitimise the image. The image speaks for itself. However, as Winter (1999) has pointed out, expressive statements like this are part of a continuum of creative activity. I hold the beauty of the image in my eye and it creates resonances with these other aesthetic experiences of art. The link between my first person noticing of these connections and my second person practice is that I am now more accepting of the discovery of other gifts like this; it also prompted an appreciative interaction with Zahid.

As my inquiry has progressed, I now see the value of also directly declaring what I notice in such moments, not necessarily by reference to Emin and Hodgkin, although even there I am still working from a prejudicial assumption. Chris for example might offer references to many other contemporary artists unknown to me.

I take from this the need to notice when I hold back on sharing aesthetic judgements and why. Expressing what you find beautiful in ways that are inclusive, is another skill that I am learning to develop through my practice.

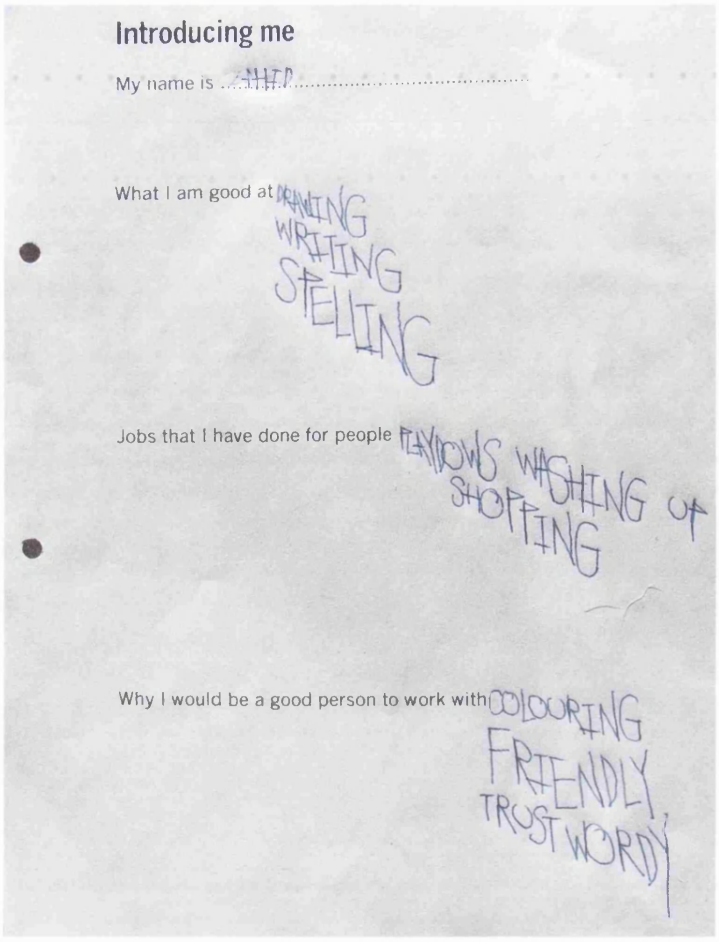
Journal – 'Trustwordy'

In pairs, a member of staff and a service user engaged in this activity, which is about putting some form of CV together. In quiet and purposeful way, people talked through and recorded their answers on the sheet I had prepared.

This focused attention provided a good contrast to the large group discussion. There was also some useful coaching from staff for those who can write, as they put their statements together. Zahid's writing (see overleaf) is all in capitals and makes a very strong pattern as the words drop off in diagonal lines across the page.

Commentary

Again I think Zahid has produced a statement, which in my receiving of it becomes an artwork.



I particularly like the last word.

It visually expresses the deliberateness of Zahid's engagement with me when he talks. This is his voice on paper.

At a practical level it also revealed to me a competence in writing which I had not so far realized he had; I change my expectations about what sort of work he might be able to do.

Play and friendship

The link between play and friendship is illustrated in the extracts that follow. I have at intervals referred to the difference in the type of connection I experienced in Silver Street, when compared to that of other assignments. It was frequently characterised by playfulness and led over time to a sense of friendship. This was in part a consequence of my spending more time in this community than with that of others of my clients; but this does not fully explain the quality of relationship that evolved. At the end of this section I shall return to this issue, but first I consider some relevant journal extracts.

Journal – Cream buns

It is a DIY lunch; a number of service users have brought their own and those who haven't come with us to Tescos round the corner and buy something to eat. Ian buys a dozen or so cream buns which cause great delight amongst most of our group, particularly with Andrew who later admits to having eaten three and Tulay, two.

Commentary

At intervals in Parts B and C I have made a comparison between the ethos of Silver Street and family life.

Playfulness was frequently evident. Ian's indulgence of the group in this way had a friendly almost paternal quality to it – what you would do in a family if you were feeling generous (and had a penchant for creams buns!).

Play in the sense of a dramatic process was evident too in the rise and fall of energy as each day progressed. It was particularly important with this group to anticipate shifts in mood and their readiness to participate. On occasions one or two people would decide enough was enough and withdraw themselves into the office to play on the computer. I felt quite relaxed about this.

The celebration of arrival and departure was important; it always contained a touch of celebratory Ilinx, as the following example shows,

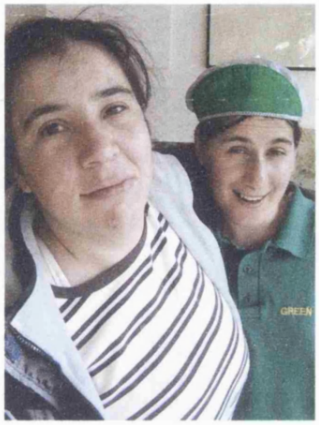
Journal – Acknowledging people

There is an easy sense of association about the group. People are obviously pleased to be together again. Zahid comes up to me and says, "Hallo Alan; I have met you before." His way of doing this is very measured and would suit some relayed public announcement although it is more quietly spoken. His voicing of the words is at odds with a friendly smile of recognition. However, there's no doubt about the underlying message – yes; he's pleased to be here.

Commentary

The quality of existing friendships between service users and their full-time staff was imported into this temporary community at the ETS centre.

Tulay has a lively style and attends English classes at college. I find her quite difficult to understand but somehow she still communicates in a positive way. I thank her with my only words of Turkish, sounding something like, 'Teshekur ederim', (a linguistic remnant from a Turkish holiday forty years ago). She dissolves into laughter, burying her face in her hands.



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I have less day-to-day contact with Silver Street, but felt a friendly welcome and growing connection in this piece of work. When I bump into staff or service users later there has always been a sense of reunion or celebration of our having worked together.

This next extract describes the way in which what is initially a work relationship becomes a place in which personal values can be explored.

Journal – Iraq

Today we'll be looking at CV writing and interview skills. ...

I go into Tesco's, fast alas becoming my main source of nourishment, and buy a bagel and bottle of water.

I meet Chris at the checkout; he is buying milk and today's boxes of cream buns.

Commentary

The chance position of this episode with Chris here interacts with the earlier references to Chris, the person who sees angels and rides an environmentally friendly bike.

Through this friendship I am to be lent Chris' copy of a video of Noam Chomsky's polemic against US foreign policy.

As we walk to the centre he tells me about the music of an Iraqi musician that he has brought for us to play on the CD today. He heard it on the radio then managed to buy a copy from America. We are coincidentally into the second day of the US marine and Iraqi army's 'liberation' of Falluja, the grim irony of which doesn't escape us.

The ugly story from Iraq is threaded through my journals of this project.

Including references like that prompted Sue to comment on what she describes as the holistic approach I have adopted in my journal writing.

What do these fragments suggest to me about the notion of friendship within an inquiry?

Tillmann-Healey (2003) develops a case for regarding friendship as an inquiry method. (See my earlier reference to this in Chapter 6.) Drawing on Rawlins (1992), she describes friendship as,

> **'an interpersonal bond characterized by the ongoing communicative management of dialectical tensions, such as those between idealization and realization, affection and instrumentality, and judgement and acceptance.' (Tillmann-Healey, 2003, p. 730)**

The concept of managing dialectical tensions within 'friendship as method' is an interesting way of framing what I experience to be happening in cooperative inquiry. For example maintaining a balance between judgement and acceptance presents itself in all encounters. In the emotional contract that we set up with others; put baldly, some people are more to our taste than others. (I explored this issue of the aesthetic 'taste' in relationships in the Mr Savindra journal in Chapter 7, *The intrinsic aesthetic in practice*.) Friendship depends on some generosity of spirit through which differences can be recognized and contained.

There was an ease of working with this group, which had a strong family dimension. There was a warmth of relations that comes from talking, eating, drinking, walking together. The flow from one activity to the next was often governed by my gut feeling that we needed a new mode of play to sustain the progress of the day.

I take from this that in any future work I will be seeking out the potential it holds for inquiring through friendship as a method. This may declare itself in choosing more

assignments where there is time and space for this to occur, as well as recognizing the constraints of working in its absence.

Action research

In this last section I return to the participative approach through which the whole of this inquiry has been made.

Journal – The inquiry issue	Commentary
I explain that we are going to spend four days helping develop the new ETS Service and that we will start today by asking ourselves the question, 'What does work mean to us?' and then move on to think about what work individuals would really like to do and what it might take to begin to do it.	This journal entry briefly notes my introductory words on the purpose of our cooperative inquiry. The formulation of the inquiry question, 'What does work mean to us?' may have assumed greater levels of reflexivity than the group were able to work with. The practical questions were the ones that engaged them – what would you really like to do and what might it take to begin doing it? I take from this the absolute requirement that inquiry questions must really resonate with a group, which in fact proved to be the case – they really wanted to find some work. The related issue of pitching the question in appropriate language was of less importance, but I note that I can still be a prisoner of my own rhetoric.

The next excerpt acts as an illustrated roll-call

Journal – Connections	Commentary
We work round the room and I choose to introduce each person, by asking their name and establishing a first connection with them. I recognise Sharon – I had seen her at her day centre.	I am aware of the sensory nature of this moment of meeting.

She sits with her friend, Eileen. They both take in everything that is going on. Sharon has an impish relationship with Ian (a senior manager); at one point later she tells him to talk less by using her hand to mime a speaking mouth. He acknowledges the reproof playfully. She has a friendly quiet manner and seems pleased to be here. Eileen responds with great warmth and smiling contact with me whenever I or anyone else addresses her. Andrew is wearing an England shirt but tells me he is an Arsenal supporter too. He is lively and takes part in everything going on. I can't always understand what he says. Chris explains to me at one point that Andrew is saying, 'Cagney and Lacey' and Andrew confirms this by lunging into the middle of the room, holding us up with two pistol fingers. Everyone laughs and I ask him to do it again, which he does. More laughter.

I notice how each voice, inflection, the turn of a head, rturn of a head,itations all 'flesh out', quite literally, our participative relationship, as we make contact around the circle.

Andrew's mimetic play was wild and my urge to see it again irresistible.

Including these thumbnail sketches here is a way of reminding myself of the in-the-moment phenomenon of engaging with new people, in this case people who are to become co-inquirers with me. My commentary supplements the journal by going back to the facial and physical presences that are part of the process of association. The brief stories of Eileen shushing Ian and Andrew's Cagney and Lacey routine tap into the play of the group through which I sense their lively feelings and energy.

The mimetic process of responding to self-images has already been referred to above. Here as part of the action research approach of this inquiry, people were enabled through the photos and stories, to place themselves imaginatively in the futures that they wanted for themselves.

Journal – Externalized reflections

As I hand round the large photos that Keith produced, they have for most people the effect of triggering off

Commentary

The value of this process of externalizing inner reflections

thoughts and feelings of pleasure and recognition. There's a lot of laughter. Equally for some, a minority, they shy away from seeing themselves in this setting. Whether their inhibitions are mock or real, or would dissipate in a different setting, I'm not sure. Hopefully the informal circulation process is flexible enough for people to 'pass' without too much difficulty.

Mostly though people seem pleased to be reminded of our last session in this way. The pictures provide pegs on which to hang some conversations about the experience of being out together. Those who stood to be photographed outside the local college are acknowledged as attendees of courses. Andrew and Christina are seen with the staff member, Sue, in their Polaroid, standing in front of the car repair centre where they work part-time.

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and images, was clearly evident. The photos contextualised people's aspirations about work and further training and education.

For example, going to stand outside the local FE college where some people were attending courses was represented to others through the photo, the video and audio recordings that people had made.

My own contribution to this process was to read short extracts of my journal for the previous week, with immediate feedback from Andrew.

This can be seen as a metaphor for a process which underpins all action research approaches. The seeking out and the 'importing' of these images linked the action of work to reflexive processes in the group.

I read an excerpt from my journal to the group. It describes Andrew's football allegiances and then his Cagney and Lacy act.

When I read this out to the group, he jumps up and shakes my hand at the end of the first sentence, as though my having written it establishes a sporting bond between us. The Cagney and Lacey reference prompts him to do another gun toting mime around the room. More laughter.

Keeping the two modes of action and reflection in this dynamic relationship seemed to me to be the nub of what action research aims to do.

Each person took from this co-inquiry what made sense to them in their lives. (That's what happens in any case with all groups.) My judgment about the nature of the work is that in this perilously fragile short-term community we created something of what McKnight (1995) describes as the care that families and communities offer spontaneously.

Journal – My inquiry method

Sue has read my journal so far and comments that she likes the way I incorporate incidental stories in my account of our days together. She had mentioned on two earlier occasions how she is finding our days different from what she expected. Later I ask her to tell me more about this.

She explains that coming from a FE lecturing background, she is more used to taught sessions. She gestures to suggest rows of tables. What we are doing together is, she says, is more holistic. We are working it out as we go, in response to service users' ideas and needs. I wish I had tape-recorded her answer because it confirmed what I thought was happening.

Commentary

Sue's comments on my incidental story-telling in the journals and her experience of our sessions together, provided a double confirmation for me about where my journey had so far reached.

Her gesture towards the imaginary rows of lecture hall seats was like my final farewell to former ways of working with people. The messy hubbub of Silver Street-3 and other settings yet to be encountered are where I now want to be.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a summary of the main inquiry themes that have developed through the three pieces of Silver Street work and elsewhere. This last project to define and support work and training opportunities for people with learning difficulties represented a significant staging point in the journey of my changing practice. In particular the fact that the inquiry group contained the people for whom the initiative was set up, meant that I had to be attuned even more closely to the intrinsic aesthetic of our time together. The development of this skill of attention will, I hope, stand me in good stead with other groups, where what is there to be read is more social constrained, but nevertheless equally influential in furthering or hindering inquiry.

The other major inquiry focus in this last piece of work was the enabling effect that working with expressive media had on our capacity to process and reflect on chosen issues.

I have represented what I learned in Silver Street-3 as a fieldbook or a collection of fragments arranged around the main themes of the thesis. I argued that they might possess a holographic quality, in that each contained something of the essence of the whole. I have tried to trace some of these multiple meanings by making links back into earlier chapters both at a theoretical level as well as through association with journal writing of other practice experiences.

Although I have not told the story of Silver Street-3 in a linear sequence, I hope the quality of our time together comes across. The cutting up and scrambling of the story in this way has made the focus of the material more thematic. A comparison might also be made with the filmic technique of jump-cutting which invites the viewer to recompile the story more participatively. I found these days deeply significant to my thinking about the past, present and the future of my practice. The aesthetic of this group was playful and at times poignant.

It is also worth at this stage re-stating that my first person inquiry into the aesthetic in practice has depended crucially on second person work in Silver Street and elsewhere. This symbiotic relationship now finds expression here in a third person dialogue with those who read this thesis.

In the short concluding chapter that follows I will touch on some of the aspirations this research gives me for different ways of working in the future.

Working sketch – No end

Having reached this final stage of the thesis, I am reflecting on endings and the rhetoric of ending. I want to avoid some of the trappings and fantasies of a terminus. The script of working towards an end can assume an aspirational upward trend, like the conclusion of a final movement of a symphony in a rhythmic percussion of resolving chords.

Perhaps this is another reason why I find Strauss' Four Last Songs so moving; he prefaces a series of final chords of the second song with a querulous grace note. His themes emerge from, evolve and drift back into the dream-like chordal flow of the music.

I therefore want this last piece to read more like a significant telegram from a staging post, a semaphore from a high place, but still open to further inquiry and expecting to stay that way.

It is not in the past or the future that I learn,
but in the here and now,
through cycles of reflection and action.

14 Conclusion and Coda

14 Conclusion and Coda

Introduction

I shall use one last journal item from Silver Street-3, – in a way which is called a *segue* in sound broadcasting, – to create a link between Chapter 13 and this concluding chapter. It describes a moment in Day 1 when we considered what dreams we had for our futures.

'We now talk about people's dreams; this was done in pairs, each pair containing a service user and a member of staff.

Below are listed people's dreams of what they would like to do or be. The activity raised all sorts of questions about the legitimacy of dreaming and the gap between dreams and reality. I settle for the simple formula that we need dreams to live.

Stuart, staff A scriptwriter
Yvonne, service user A florist or working in a clothes shop
George, service user Working in garden centre (which he is now)
Sharon, service user Working in a video or CD shop
Chris, staff Running a bike shop
Jacques, staff Running a coffee shop
Tulay, service user Helping in a library
Zahid, service user Signwriter or artist (already started)
Dean, service user A boxer or working in an office
Eileen, service user A cleaner in an office
Christina, service user A mechanic
Andrew, service user Pop musician or mechanic
Sue, staff Painting/making models
Ian, staff Doing what he does now.

Ian says that when he was in his twenties he dreamt that he would have so much money by 40 that he could retire. That, he now sees, is not likely to happen, but he's found something much more satisfying in this work with people with disabilities.'

This list of jobs towards which the cooperative inquiry members aspired, now acts for me as a metaphor or proxy, for all hoped-for change in lives, a lifetime's seeking out of purpose individually and with others in families, communities and organizations. It acquires a poetic significance for me through its selection and inclusion here. Arranging the text in a symmetrical layout creates a typographic image which gives it a reference to other poetic structure – I think for example of the wing shaped stanza design of George Herbert's poem, *Easter Wings*. This record of our dreaming together also reminds me of the listing of names on a birth or death certificate – 'Father: Charles Albert Finch George, Insurance Clerk'.

There have been other references to dreams earlier in the thesis, for example, the dreaming of my travelling companion on the M25, as he recited from memory W.B.Yeats, 'Sailing to Byzantium'.

'...

O sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, pern in a gyre,
And be the singing masters of my soul.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity.

...' (Yeats, 1933, 1960 edition, pp. 217-8)

I also find myself returning to Gaston Bachelard (1958), referenced in Chapter 11, *Poetics in Practice*, and his description of the concept of 'home', as the store of dreams,

'Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams: we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost.' (Bachelard, 1958, p. 6)

A greater alertness to the dreams that were lost or scarcely noticed is a poetic process, which has featured prominently in my inquiry.

In this final chapter I want to reflect on this dream metaphor for what it tells me about purpose in inquiry and the distinctive ways in which aesthetic experience brings depth and quality to this existential quest for purpose in lives, mine own included. In fact the most pervasive dream throughout this thesis is my own as I have discovered, with and through relating to others, my personal sense of the aesthetic in practice.

My aims will be to,

- take some final sightings on the value of aesthetic practice
- conclude the story of this stage of a journey into a changing practice.

In a short coda to this chapter I shall reflect on the future direction of my practice.

Aesthetic knowing for a change

I shall now draw together some closing reflections on my reasons for taking this journey and the insights that I have acquired on the way.

My most pressing question concerns practical knowing, – how does this way of working benefit people and increase their 'human flourishing'? (Heron and Reason, 1997). What changes occur? In my own changing to a practice which depends on a deeper awareness of the intrinsic aesthetic and which introduces expressive activities as a way of inquiry, what I am offering to others?

Returning for a moment to the Silver Street-3 aspirational list above, the fact is that at the end of the short project some of these dreams listed above were still dreams, or had morphed into other ideas that seemed more attainable. One or two individuals had actual or prospective part-time jobs, George in a garden centre potting plants, Christina and Andrew getting dirty in the auto-electrics garage, and there were several others who had found training opportunities. Later I discovered that staff members, Sue and Jacques, both on short-term contracts, had had to move to other jobs. The unexpectedness of life washes over

the best-laid intentions and plans. So what was the quality of this time together and what, in propositional terms, can be said to show something of its depth and value to people?

My answer takes me back into the central argument I have been developing throughout this inquiry. During our time together people were learning in a number of different ways, experientially, through expressive representation, propositionally in the main concepts of job searching and practically in their contacts with potential employers. We also used different sensory channels and media to do so. As facilitator to this cooperative inquiry, my function was not only to hold a focus on the agreed inquiry task, but also to relate with people in the light of the intrinsic aesthetic of the group as I experienced it. This as my journal extracts show rendered me open to a deeper level of receptivity to the play and poetics of what we were engaged in. This changed what I gave attention to amongst us and how I responded in actions and words. By making these journals freely available to all participants, I was also encouraging a wider and more reflexive receptivity to this aesthetic in other participants.

People voiced their wishes and needs. For the staff in particular, my written journal prompted a changed dialogue about the experience of collaboration. We discussed what we were noticing about the way we worked together. We formed brief friendships which gave us glimpses into each other's dreams and aspirations. The extensive use of expressive media offered us all the chance to create new reflexive images of how we are in the world. Through them people were able to externalize their thoughts and feelings about being in this inquiring community.

Through imaginative association with each other, we were re-storying what might be possible for all participants. In addition we were experiencing the 'surplus' of unexpected social and personal learning that occurs in and around expressive activities, often perceived in snatches of dialogue which were less likely to surface or be heard in other settings.

Accounts of the two cooperative inquiries described in this thesis, have provided material for an exploration of the balance and interrelationship between the intrinsic and the expressive modes of aesthetic experience and the pervasive presence of play and the poetic in practice. This exploration has been motivated by my wish to find a more reflexive and purposeful practice which has a reciprocity of benefits for all of us who participated in them.

Now I want to bring together these contextually specific insights in a more propositional overview of the changes that I notice occurring through attending more fully to the aesthetic in practice.

The temporality of the aesthetic

Some interactions in practice acquire dramatic force in the moment. Gadamer (1975) refers to 'the temporality of the aesthetic' in his ontology of art. He defines that timelessness which comes over an enthralled spectator.

> **'In fact, being outside oneself is the positive possibility of being wholly with something else. This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness, and to be a spectator consists of giving oneself in self-forgetfulness to what one is watching. Here self-forgetfulness is anything but a privative condition, for it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter in hand, and this is the spectator's own positive accomplishment.' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 122)**

Although Gadamer was writing about the participative timelessness of being absorbed in a play or artwork, a sense of timelessness and self-forgetfulness also accompanies intense engagement between people. To live really in the moment and give full attention to the other is an aesthetic phenomenon, whose timelessness is only subsequently framed in time through reflexive writing and other media. There are other experiences where we step out of time; I think of the balance between seeking and receiving sleep described by Merleau-Ponty and referenced earlier in Chapter 3, *A Theoretical Framework*.

Drawing on Kierkegaard's notion of the contemporaneity of dialectical theology, Gadamer compares this with his own conceptualisation of contemporaneity of the aesthetic experience of art works.

> **'A spectator's ecstatic self-forgetfulness corresponds to his continuity with himself.' (Ibid., p.124)**

> **'what rends him from himself at the same time gives him back the whole of his being.' (Ibid., p. 125)**

This sense of rising above the quotidian towards a transformative contemporeality is a consistent theme of my journalling of practice experience. I think of experiences of stepping beyond the current time frame and becoming absorbed into a transcendent moment, when language, actions and gestures create new metaphorical and symbolic meanings.

The related point that Gadamer is making is that in such moments we are 'given back' the whole of our being, by creating **'the possibility of being wholly with something else.'** His view of this imaginative union is that it offers a reciprocal sense of being more completely who we are. Taylor and Hansen (2005) allude to a transcendent purpose in focusing on aesthetic experience and aesthetic forms,

> **'because they are about our feelings of what it is to be part of more than ourselves.'**
> **(Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1226)**

Some of my encounters with service users and staff in Silver Street gave me a sense of being more wholly in touch with myself at the moment of being wholly with the other.

Much of the language used to describe transcendence is couched in a rising or 'up' orientational metaphor, (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). There are other metaphorical directions to this participatory practice too. Sometimes I can imagine a sense of paradox when meaning is stretched in the group sideways and outwards till it hums like a taught wire, or it might involve one meaning being destroyed in anger whilst we look for a new meaning to rise from the ashes. Transcendence may feel more like lying with meaning and enjoying it, or laughing with it in what Caillois (1958) calls Ilinx or vertiginous ecstasy.

Taylor and Hansen (2005) apply Strati's inclusive view of the aesthetic to the processes of organizational inquiry,

> **'The idea of more beautiful action in organizations is intuitively appealing, but the aesthetic category of the grotesque may be the key to personal and organizational transformation.'**
> **(Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p. 1216)**

Some transformative moments are not necessarily evidenced by extreme emotion or sense of dramatic tension. They could just as well be moments of resolution, being quiet with a group, saying nothing but feeling connected and at peace; I describe such moment at the

end of the dramatic encounter with Lucy's challenge in Chapter 10, *Play in Practice*. They are distinguished as moments of heightened awareness, which are 'out of time'.

Aesthetic experience is a continuous consequence of being a conscious and sentient human, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out,

> **'Aesthetic experience is thus not limited to the official art world. It can occur in any aspect of our everyday lives – whenever we take note of, or create for ourselves, new coherences that are part of our conventionalized mode of perception and thought.' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, p. 236)**

New coherences in Silver Street-3 were explored through expressive media around what part-time work might mean for service users. For the staff there was a parallel inquiry in how to support the development of this new service. The evidence was being played out live through their interaction with service users on this question; we could see and hear what seemed to be working and what was not.

Imagination for a change

Midgley provides another insight into the purpose and value of aesthetic knowing in practice, when she claims that,

> **'Our visions – our ways of imagining the world – determine the direction of our thoughts, as well as being the source of our poetry. Poetry exists to express those visions directly, in concentrated form. But they are also expressed less directly in all our thoughts and actions, including scientific ones, where they often pass unnoticed and uncriticised. (Midgley, 2001, p. 2)**

The imagination is seen not only as being at play in the creation of artworks such as poetry but as an engaged reflexive and creative response to all perceived experience. It is for this reason that I have placed as much emphasis on inquiring into the intrinsic aesthetic in practice as I have in using expressive activities and artefacts with groups. I have also concluded earlier in the thesis that it is vital to find contingences between the two, in choosing such activities. By contingency I mean the creative match of a number of factors, such as the readiness that I perceive in the group to step into expressive work and the

perception in the group that in doing so they are still pursuing the inquiry that matters to them. In some cases dialogic inquiry drawing on the intrinsic play and poetics of the group may be more than sufficient, without the potential distraction of more arts-based expressive activities. I have also found structured storytelling of the type described in Chapter 8, *The Expressive Aesthetic in Practice*, to be a natural but influential way of making a transition into expressive activities.

Rorty places the imagination at the centre of the process of reaching out to others; in so doing we also 're-describe' ourselves. It is through the aesthetic act of imagining how our lives and those of others might be, that we empathetically make greater connection and find new ways of acting together. I refer again to Rorty's view that,

> **'This process of coming to see other human beings as 'one of us' rather than as 'them' is a matter of detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like and of redescription of what we ourselves are like.' (Rorty, 1989, p. xvi)**

Expression for a change

This re-description, Rorty (1989) argues, is increasingly manifest through the use of expressive media, such as film or novels. Knowing in this way is not to be considered as an alternative route to the same destination. It assumes a different way of knowing which uncovers different areas of experience and these generate what Rorty refers to as 'human solidarity'.

In Winter et al., (1999), Winter argues that the product of artistic imagination has a general significance, over and above say, a report or other factual descriptions. Aesthetic statements connect with '**a background mythology of universal themes: patterns of comedy and tragedy; ...**' (Winter et al., 1999, p. 202). I was for example keenly aware of the potential comedy and tragedy of the 'condom' episode described in the summer walk in the park in Chapter 4, *Inquiry Methods*, and other poignant moments in Silver Street.

His second point is that, by '**embedding a concrete experience in an artistic structure, the imagination, as it were, converts it into a pattern of general significance, by revealing it as 'symbolic'....**' (Ibid., 1999, p. 202)

Through reference to Barry's work (1994) I have explored the role of symbolic representation in my own use of model-making. In the opening of this chapter I have imbued the job list with a level of symbolic meaning.

Rich (2006) argues passionately for the value of the poetic as a way of re-discovering a *future forgotten*,

> **'What's pushing the grammar and syntax, the sounds, the images – is it the constriction of literalism, fundamentalism, professionalism – a stunted language? Or is it the great muscle of metaphor, drawing strength from resemblance in difference? Poetry has the capacity to remind us of something we are forbidden to see. A future forgotten: a still uncreated site whose moral architecture is founded not on ownership and dispossession, the subjection of women, outcast and tribe, but on the continuous redefining of freedom – that word now held under house arrest by the rhetoric of the "free" market. This on-going future, written-off over and over, is still within view. All over the world its paths are rediscovered and reinvented.**
>
> **There is always that in poetry which will not be grasped, which cannot be described, which survives our ardent attention, our critical theories, our late-night arguments. There is always (I am quoting the poet/translator Américo Ferrari) "an unspeakable where, perhaps, the nucleus of the living relation between the poem and the world resides." ' (Rich, 2006, p. 3)**

Writing for a change

In Chapter 4, *Inquiry methods*, I referred to my chosen methods, which were writing and more recently photography. Another important feature of the methodology that developed was to return the material that I produced to the people who featured in it. Beyond this audience lies a further third person audience to whom this thesis is now addressed.

The influence for change in me of writing and reflecting on writing in this way has been significant. I have learnt to reflect in a more structured way but have also become more open to the creative connections that occur in the process of writing.

The influence for change on those who read what I have written has been felt in the informal dialogue and feedback which it generated.

As Sparkes (2002) claims,

> **'This kind of writing can inform, awaken, and disturb readers by illustrating their involvement in social processes about which they might not have been consciously aware. Once aware, individuals may find the consequences of their involvement (or lack of it) unacceptable and seek to change the situation. In such circumstances, the potential for individual and collective restorying is enhanced.' (Sparkes, 2002, p. 221)**

Gergen (2003) describes writing as *relationship*,

> **'Especially relevant to my present concerns are writers who have tried to foster a more richly laminated relationship with the reader. Rather than positioning themselves as fully rational agents, bounded, and superior, the effect of these writings is to generate a more recognizably human persona, one to whom the reader may sense a shift from the division of me vs. you to "the two of us." In terms of the Enlightenment conception of the person, such writing reasserts the significance of the otherwise marginalized domains of the psyche: desire, emotion, bodily sensation. Carolyn Bochner captures the spirit of such writing when she speaks of her writing on the mother-daughter relationship as "showing the connections among the seasons of a woman's life and encouraging readers to sense what I am feeling as well as hear what I am thinking. And to express their own feelings and think about their own experiences. (Bochner and Ellis, 1996)" '**
> **(Gergen, 2003, p. 5)**

This transformational potential in writing for a change has already been illustrated in the conversations and feedback from staff in Silver Street and elsewhere. As I will suggest in the short coda attached to this chapter, I hope to use this way of inquiring to support change with other groups I work with.

Taylor and Hansen (2005) see artistic inquiry into aesthetics as,

> **'the real hope for organizational inquiry that aesthetics offers us. The use of artistic forms to look at aesthetic issues offers a medium that can capture and communicate the felt experience, the affect, and something of the tacit knowledge of the day-to-day, moment-to-moment reality of organizations. Not just the cleaned-up, instrumental concerns of "the business", but the messy, unordered side as well. In short it provides a holistic way to get at the whole of the experience, something that the intellectualization and abstraction of traditional organizational research often seems to miss.' (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p.1224)**

Conclusion

My description of the part of my life that I have spent in Silver Street is an account a journey of change. The scale of difference between a life with physical and learning disability and my own has forced me to imagine new connections. As Bateson points out the *news of difference* prompts learning from which memory and knowledge accrue.

In Chapter 1 I explained why the experience of being involved in the Silver Street world has proved so valuable to me. I am still in touch regularly and was invited by the Day Centre Manager, to join her on a series of interagency meetings to monitor and support the implementation of more person-centred activities and opportunities for people with learning disabilities throughout the borough. I go early and spend some time beforehand in the unit where I varnished Lorraine's nails, chatting with staff and feeding one or two people and by the way getting offered a lunch myself.

Although the intrinsic aesthetic processes of poetics, stories, image and play that I experienced at Silver Street, are found in all practice settings, they were much more evident to me in the bustle and directness of this different community.

Spending time with autistic people, raised important questions about the blinkered nature of my understanding of my perceived world. It challenged me to stop assuming that I can take anyone's experience for granted, as this may lead to the delusion that I know better than they, what they need. Unconditional positive regard seemed to be a given amongst most of the staff with whom I worked at Silver Street – I aspire to show as much generosity to others I work with.

Taking an overview of the three Silver Street projects, I am very grateful that the intuitions that took me there proved right. Silver Street became a metaphor and a reference point for the whole of my practice. Nothing that we needed to do together in learning how to develop our sense of community, is incapable of translation to other settings. There were differences in the pace of learning and ways of communicating, and of course the duty of care that people were owed. (But then what duty of care do I owe the youth workers, social workers or lawyers with whom I also work, or indeed my duty of care to myself?)

I opened this chapter with a reference to dreams. I often dream at night of journeys in cities, parts of which are known to me, but others, totally unfamiliar. I recently tried to capture on waking up, some of this paradox of *strange familiarity* in this short poem. I can detect memories of Singapore from forty years ago, blending with the dream of *home*.

Who said, 'The end'?

The acacias burn along the street.
Already there's tea on the terrace;
some people must know me, I think.

Now the sun has gone fast into the ground.
Round the next corner
will still be Boogy Street
and the bay where strange things happened.

I am off again
sniffing the pot pourri night,
driving the orchard into the sea.

Where is the home I used to own,
my clutch of goods?
Too soon to tell me it's enough
and no space left to travel.

Who said, 'The end'?

Coda

Here are some of my closing semaphores from a hilltop, expectations, day dreams about what lies beyond this thesis.

I hope to build on the experience of being in Silver Street and seek out opportunities to 'befriend' one or two other organizations. As I have developed my skills in representing my perception of organizational life through writing and photos, I can imagine using these as part of my offer of engagement. One connection that I would enjoy now, would be with an orchestra, film-makers, or dancers, or a theatre company, in some way which is participative and mutually interesting.

I shall release my family and friends from the thraldom of waiting for me as I nearly finished my thesis.

I shall recognize that this whole thing ran the risk of getting out of hand and get back to attending more to their needs.

I shall notice theory continuing to inform my practice, practice informing my theory.

At least once and quite soon, I shall go by myself to S W France and not hire a car, (although you could fool yourself that you needed one when spending time there in a remote farm

house.) Instead I will do the last piece of the journey by bus, climb up the hill on foot, open the shutters and catch myself involuntarily sighing for a few days, occasionally walking five miles to the nearest village shop, and relying on the small stash of St Emilion in the cupboard from last Summer.

I shall go to Silver Street, having surfaced from the grubby underground and ring the front door bell to get access again to this community –  and do whatever may be useful.

I shall replace my ageing Apple laptop by an Apple Powerbook and fill it with photos and maybe some video, poems and excerpts from what I have written, my hundred top quotations from this thesis and other reading, as a resource to travel with and add to. Maybe also I'll set up a new website, to attract connections with others who are interested in the areas I research.

This is my message to 

all I love.

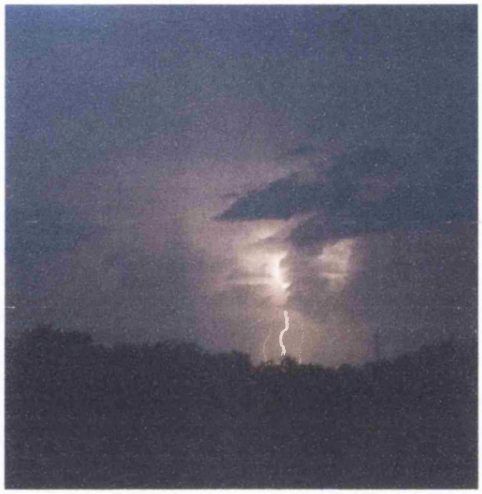
I shall aim to reduce the present predominance of 'events' in my practice. My first eight days at Silver Street were not events; I was just there taking part in the life of the centre. I can imagine the liberation that will follow for me as facilitator and for people with whom I consult, if working together meant just that, – a sort of residency with more time spent within the day-to-day business of organizations.

I shall try again to get some poems published and maybe write more fiction.

I shall see my drift into semi-retirement as a luxurious opportunity to allocate my working time with less need to charge for it. I want to exploit this new freedom to the full and happily set behind me the obligation to take on work, the only merit of which was to put bread on the table.

I shall deepen further my alertness to the intrinsic aesthetic in my life and work. I shall recognize that practice makes better, but perfection is the enemy of the good.

I shall continue to be captured by the serendipitous play of practice
and the lost poetry in dreams,



and try to learn from the news of difference, that is the next day.

Meta-commentary

Introduction

This meta-commentary has been written at a short interval after the completion of the main body of the thesis. In it I reflect further on what I have learnt about organisational aesthetics and action research through the participative inquiry I undertook in Silver Street. From these reflections I shall feature what may be of relevance and usefulness to others.

I have divided this meta-commentary into four separate sections.

In Section 1 I discuss those themes which may inform the organisational aesthetics community.

In Section 2 I discuss how I developed an aesthetic methodology for action inquiries, which has implications for both the organisational aesthetics and action research communities.

In Section 3 I consider how my changing practice as an action research facilitator has been informed by the aesthetic stance I have adopted and how this offers further insights to the action research community.

In Section 4 I conclude this commentary by considering the issues of validity and quality that I have had to address in making an inquiry into the aesthetic in practice.

I recognise in thinking about this meta-commentary that there is some considerable cross-over between these four areas, since my interest in organisational aesthetics is always directed towards improving the way I work as a facilitator of action inquiries.

Section 1 – What this inquiry adds to organisational aesthetics research

One of the main ways in which my research contributes to organisational aesthetics is that it reasserts the significance and validity of experiential ways of knowing the intrinsic aesthetics of group practice. My approach is therefore fundamentally empirical. By this I do not mean a positivist framing of the empirical with a view to constructing objective findings. Rather I am using the term in its phenomenological sense of returning to the primacy of experience as the foundation for other types of knowing. My inquiry roots the presentational and propositional in the experiential. I have used insights drawn from phenomenology to stay with the experiential as a participative aesthetic grounding for representation and proposition.

In order to position this opening statement about the distinctive contribution of my own work I firstly offer some observations on organisational aesthetics research. Then I shall return to unpack some of the claims I have just made.

Observations on organisational aesthetics research

Organisational aesthetics literature is mainly concerned with the construction and testing of propositional narratives as a way of giving meaning and structure to the aesthetic dimensions of organisational life. Whilst such narrative arguments have their roots in the individual reflections and interests of those who write, their principal way of seeking validity is by the internal consistency and robustness of their cognitive assertions, supported by references to and citings from other research.

Organisational aesthetic literature may be divided into that which is concerned with developing cognitions, by focusing on, for example, analyses of dialogic encounters, the definition of stories, the development of typologies of play, and theories of poetics in organisational contexts, including the function of metaphor or negativity. Other research examines applications of aesthetic theory through interventions in organisations by using expressive activities with groups, for example, by storytelling, human sculpting, clowning, model making, or creative writing. These two categories correspond to the constructs that I have used in the thesis, of *intrinsic* and *expressive* aesthetics.

In either case the voice of such research is mainly propositional; it is written from a position of expert knowledge, supported by and illustrated through case studies, where the

relationship between the researcher and those who feature in the case studies is largely unstated. For example, Carter and Jackson's (2000) insightful contribution to aesthetics through their development of a theory of organisational an-aesthetics to account for concepts of organisational denial, power and control, provides no hint as to any personal association which may have led to their decision to use the Commonwealth War Graves Commission as a focus of study. I found their theoretical perspective very useful and drew on it in deepening my own understanding of issues in Silver Street. I am, however, left to speculate how their research may have been received by this organization, how doing this research may have changed this relationship or how gaining this insight altered their own ways of relating to their experienced world. I do not doubt that it did, but I imagine that addressing these inevitable collateral experiences might be seen by the authors as a distraction from the propositional clarity of their argument. It was not what interested them as researchers.

To characterize further what I understand to be the position of organisational aesthetics I now briefly draw attention to some of the moments where writers seem to define the boundaries of their framing of research by straying across them. A number of organisational aesthetic writers do draw on their personal experience to corroborate or illustrate their theoretical claims. To take a specific example, Linstead (2000) leads into a discussion of the poetic, by telling the story of a drive he made into Sydney. Later he reflects on a statement on impending redundancies written by the President of the Asia-Pacific Institute of Technology, although he does not make clear whether or not he might have been affected by it. He uses a critical review of this text to illustrate proteophobia and then moves on to discuss the silent implicative double. I particularly noticed his decision to illustrate a theoretical distinction by reference to his driving in Australia and his response to a working document. Such a contextualization shifts for a moment our perception to a new relational awareness of the presence of the writer and problematises the validity of the personal in the depersonalized narrative of academic research.

Linstead's description of his journey speaks from a genre of writing that belongs to the novel. I notice that this connects with my own way of representing practice experiences. I too regard the environmental setting of an experience as contributing its own peculiar nuance or timbre and for me it therefore becomes a necessary part of the description. Its incorporation changes the voice of the text and in so doing, enriches the transmission of propositions by embedding them in the particular aesthetic context from which they sprang. Consequently

they now invite the reader into a closer relationship with the writer. Creative narrative has its own poetic communication pathways that complement the factual and the propositional.

The main narrative, though, of what follows in Linstead's paper is a robust theoretical account of negativity and poetics in inquiry methodologies. In reading it I found a very rich theoretical framing of reference and connections with the work of a range of writers in this field. It offered me greater clarity in constructing my own propositional framework. It also confirmed the significance of what I had chosen to inquire into, in that I could see that others had assembled their own theoretical basis for thinking about play and poetics processes within organisational life. However, in providing only these fleeting and partial glimpses into the experiential context from which the author is writing, he sustains the nature of the text as a propositional and largely depersonalised narrative.

In drawing attention to cognitive and narrative processes present in the same text, I am neither claiming that one is superior to the other, nor am I claiming, for example, that theory should always be clothed in the personal context of the theoretician. Rather I am highlighting the significantly different epistemological stances at work in both instances.

My choice of an empirical approach to organisational aesthetics

My approach to organisational aesthetics is framed very differently. I am working empirically with the experienced aesthetic of an organisation and I am doing so by exploring both aesthetic presentations of others as well their imaginative impact on myself as a reflexive practitioner. I am always preoccupied by the interplay of the two questions with which I opened this thesis,

- What is my developing aesthetic in practice?
- How does working in this way support participative inquiry with others?

I am never without a sense of needing to make more overt a systemic relationship with the people and context of my research, nor of my own participative involvement in it. The source of my inquiry is in phenomenological participation with the people, places and moments of our being together. Working within an action research approach I recognise my own inextricable participation in what I choose to study. I shall consider what my research adds to the action research community later in this commentary, but note again here how

interwoven is the task of defining this empirical contribution to organisational aesthetics, with that of defining my distinctive contribution to action research.

Of course I acknowledge the importance of received and personally validated propositional knowledge from the literature which has helped me articulate a greater understanding of my practice experience. So for example, my exploration of phenomenological theory through readings in Gadamer (1975) and Merleau-Ponty (1942, 1945 and 1964), has provided me with a language with which to reflect on powerful but often transitory impressions. I have also described, by reference to Bachelard (1958), how physical context has its own poetics of space, which is embedded in how we relate to each other in particular inquiry processes. These readings have helped me return to and dwell with the aesthetic experiences of group encounters. I have learnt to develop a reflexive capacity to stay with what presents itself in the poetics and the play of these moments. This has required a more refined discipline of noticing to what my attention is drawn, and of being more open in the moment to its symbolic or its dramatic impact on me and on others.

However even here I notice that the theories I selected, – broadly phenomenological and ethnographic, have attracted me because of their affinity with poetic and narrative experience. (Midgeley [2001] and Lakoff and Johnson [1980] point to the powerful embeddedness of metaphor in cognitive processes which already aligns us with particular theoretical stances.)

In engaging in and reflecting on the experiences of Silver Street and elsewhere in my practice I root my inquiry in moments of encounter. I experience a personal engagement with the minutiae of aesthetic encounters in daily practice. I come to these, not from the perspective of observer or even participant/observer, but through my own sense of relational connection with others in live situations. I now briefly illustrate this claim by one example from my thesis.

In describing my engagement with Mr Savindra in Chapter 7, I am trying to capture in-the-moment connections with the context in which I met him, the narrative of agonistic play unfolding between us and the formation of relational assumptions that began to spring up in both of us, as a consequence of this play. In so doing I am also making connections with what I had already read about negativity – how what is not being said looms powerfully just below the surface and influences the quality and directionality of our dialogic relationship. Some of this awareness is present at the time as I strive to understand where this agonistic

play might be leading us. In the rush of impressions about him, his card, his crowded office and glimpses through into the bar, I am rapidly trying to read more of what is not overtly present in the spoken words. Through my subsequent journaling and reflection on what I had written I am able to make a fuller and more cognitive application of the theories of play and the silent implicative double.

It was however from *experience* towards the discovery *of theories in use* that I am working here. My view of organisational aesthetics has developed through empirical inquiry into the moment and the capta with which I have worked have been the aesthetic contexts, actions, statements and artefacts that I and others engage with through that moment.

In choosing this empirical starting point, I realise that I set myself a considerable challenge, since the intrinsic aesthetic is not so readily capable of interrogation through propositional narratives. I will discuss my response to this methodological issue in Section 2.

So far I have distinguished my work from the predominantly propositional stance of much organisational aesthetics literature, by identifying the importance to me of working from my own participative experience, towards theory. This has involved my adopting a phenomenological approach, which is aptly summed up in the words of Merleau-Ponty (1945), as 'returning to the thing itself'.

I now want to describe a second way in which my work contributes to the field of organisational aesthetics. This flowed as a consequence of adopting what I have described above as an empirical approach.

The interrelation of play and poetics as a primary focus for organisational aesthetics

Firstly I will identify briefly some of the ways in which play and the poetic may be seen to interrelate at a theoretical level. Then I will say what for me has been figural about seeing these two parallel and interlocking processes as the primary focus of my inquiry into organisational aesthetics.

Some of the features that the literature ascribes either to play or the poetic are mutually transferable. For example, Huizinga (1938) has claimed that play is without purpose; it is engaged in voluntarily; it needs some formal structure of rules to work and it creates order. Each of these attributes may be considered to be present in the poetic.

The poetic is without purpose in any applied sense. The poetic that is taken over by purpose becomes dogma or tract.

The issue of rules and the creation of order which Huizinga identifies as necessary attributes of play can also be found in the shaping processes that occur in the creation of poetry. These creative rules may be subtle and individual to the particular work but without them poetic material descends ultimately into formlessness.

Considering play from a poetic perspective and also viewing both as manifestations within the context of practice, there are a number of poetic attributes which also surface in play. For example, in describing practice moments I notice that the image that speaks is often thrown into relief by the dramatic narrative of the moment that surrounds it. This is particularly evident in those moments that are serendipitous, a number of which I noticed and described in the thesis. The force of the 'Sunlight' lorry image in Chapter 7, or the cranking into view of the condom on the wheelchair in Chapter 5, have for me a filmic playfulness about them which contains a large element of Alea, or chance-based play. Being receptive to the unexpected emergence of such moments became an important part of my reflexive process. In practising being attentive to them, I have come to see them as holding strands of both play and the poetic.

A distinction that I make between play and the poetic is that play is time-based and unfolding along a narrative, – for example it has boundaries of beginning, repetition, evolution and ending, whereas the poetic is not so time dependent in that it works out of time through imagery and symbol. In play, meaning unfolds through a sequence of improvised actions, whereas words and images acquire poetic meaning through metaphorical improvisation, which is often intuitively created in the moment of dialogic connection.

What then is the significance of my placing play and poetics at the centre of an inquiry into organisational aesthetics? I can best answer this by reflecting briefly on my own experience of facilitating collaborative inquiries.

A group may have the conscious intention of resolving issues through rational and dialectic means, but the pattern and quality of the discussion still assumes the shape of play and is animated by verbal exchanges that develop their own multiple levels of poetic meaning. We attend as participants to the nuances of how our words are exchanged, how assumptions are

expressed or hidden. Protagonists explore changing roles and personas mimetically, as they discover and respond to the enactment of different roles in other players. Value judgements about what people say and do, may surface and find expression in laughter or silence, as the irony of their taking a particular position is experienced in the group. The zig-zag unpredictability of who joins or leaves a discussion, as well as what they choose to say, is a form of aleatory play, like different cards being uncovered or the pin table ball bouncing into a different pocket. The introduction of expressive activities may release the sort of energy and wellbeing that is associated with Ilynx or ecstatic play, as a group sings, dances or tells fantastic stories.

It is through processes of play and poetics that the aesthetic of the group is experienced; such experience may be felt at times as comic, ugly, grotesque or beautiful, (Strati, 2000). As the inquiry begins to unfold, it continues to be through play and poetics that shared meaning is developed and acted on. The 'presenting' issue at the start of the event undergoes a series of improvisations and re-shapings. It is possible that a difficult issue might be played out in antagonistic and destructive ways, where the poetic structures of language and gesture descend further into cliché and rigid stereotypic formulations. Alternatively the issue may be worked on through an agonistic and creative form of play where people relate more constructively with the multiple truths of different metaphorical framings of their experience. One mode of play and poetic sense-making may evolve into the other.

A further contribution to this reflection on the place of play and poetics in organisational aesthetics derives from the action research framing of this inquiry and the participative location of myself within it. As a co-participant and facilitator I have become more aware of the influence my own play and poetic processes. The narrative line of facilitation as I speak and act with the group springs from my urge to create a connection with people. However, in attuning more closely to the intrinsic aesthetic we are creating, I have to notice what is attracting my attention. I try to discover how its play and poetics are inviting me to participate and in what direction. In my responses I find myself engaged in a process of verbal improvisation around the issues that we are acting out. I am shaping in my mind possible future transitions in the play structure of the day; what change of focus and mode will best serve our needs. This is an internalised act of dramatic improvisation, a form of play that involves intense and sometimes risky imagining of possible outcomes. In making the next intervention I have to hold in mind what we have developed so far and trust in my

intuitions about what may unfold. These are all playful and aesthetic ways of feeling and behaving that closely parallel acts of creative play and poetics in other types of art making.

Conclusion to this section

In this section I have considered the empirical stance to my research that I have adopted; I have argued that this is one of the areas that distinguishes it from much of the literature of organisational aesthetics. My particular contribution has been to re-focus on the phenomena of play and poetics in the quotidian experience of practice, a returning to the thing itself. I have returned to focus on the experiential in organisational aesthetics, because I see it as the source of propositional knowing about life in groups and communities. I have also shown how play and poetics are interwoven and in evidence throughout the experiential knowing of group encounters. This focusing on play and poetics in the intrinsic aesthetic of groups also contributes to a more phenomenological understanding of organisational aesthetics.

Acknowledging the challenge that this research focus poses, I have illustrated the need for greater on-line and reflective attention to the aesthetic improvisation and dynamic shifts that occur in groups. I have argued that the trigger for such heightened attentiveness on the part of the facilitator is in her or his bodily and empathetic connection with the unfolding play and the poetic of the inquiry.

I have also begun to explore the implications of working with a different methodology, which is in itself aesthetic, and this will be the theme of the next section of this meta-commentary.

I conclude by noting that, in discovering this empirical grounding for my research, I have found a further confirmation of a broader epistemological shift in my life, that I describe in the first chapter of the thesis. There I had reflected on my choice to discontinue working in management training, which I had come to see as a process of abstracting and applying positivist models and rules. Stepping out of this paradigm now seems to me to have been an enormous liberation as I relinquished the task of trying to work with and teach theoretical rules and models about managing, when the day-to-day experience of managing in particular organisational contexts offered a far more complex and relational picture. (I have recently found Tsoukas (2006) very helpful in the distinction he draws between propositional and narrative knowledge in reviewing the field of organisational and management studies.)

Section 2 – Developing an aesthetic methodology for action inquiry

I see this section as forming a bridge between Sections 1 and 3, because of the overlap between organisational aesthetics and action research, already referred to. It also anticipates some of the discussion of validity and quality that forms the final section.

I have framed my approach to aesthetic research within communities as a live interactional process, accessible in the first place through the creative representation of my first person reflection. The representations which I have particularly used have been my writing and photos. They are imaginatively created, in ways that offer various kinds and degrees of symbolic analogue with the perceptions from which they spring. Without such representation, engaging with the intrinsic aesthetic would remain locked solipsistically within my inner life, a form of unexpressed and therefore unvalidated first person inquiry.

Taylor and Hansen (2005) draw attention to the dearth of organisational aesthetics inquiries that explore life in organisations through aesthetic approaches. I had read this and initially found myself attracted to the idea of incorporating more poetry, drama and pictures into the fabric of the thesis, despite potential problems in marrying these elements up with the more propositional text that a thesis calls for. This I took to be the way more aesthetically based research might be read and experienced.

Thus Chapter 2, *The Inquiring 'I'* and a number of the Working Sketches originally appeared to be the part of my thesis where I would 'give myself permission' to adopt expressive aesthetic ways of conducting first person inquiry; however, in so doing, I had not fully surfaced my implicit sense of 'truancy' from the orthodoxy of inquiry acquired by reading organisational aesthetics papers. Elsewhere too I have incorporated poems and pictures to maintain this strand of 'other-than-propositional' thesis writing.

In Chapter 4 of the thesis I have described the development of my use of writing and photos as the tools of this inquiry. I can now see that at a meta-level there are other more *methodological* layers, (as distinct from *methods*), to the way I have worked that are of relevance to both research communities I am addressing.

As I thought further about the question of methodology, I came to see that in the way I have framed the whole of my participative relationship with Silver Street, I have increasingly focused on the intrinsic aesthetic of all practice experience. My inquiry is grounded in

exploring the aesthetic that is already intrinsically there in abundance in practice, and particularly experienced by me in sharper relief in the Silver Street community.

My approach has been to treat the representation of inquiry as essentially an aesthetic process, where expressive qualities of narrative and imagery are used to shape my own reflections and also to evoke feelings and ideas in others. The narrative of the journals and other creative writing that I have included in the thesis attend to moments in practice that are sometimes nebulous but experienced by me as laden with poetic or playful significance. At the same time I see this process as heuristic in that I am choosing to delve more deeply into the 'truth' of the moment as I experienced it.

I have experimented with varying degrees of creative shaping of these representations ranging from journal writing to the writing of stories and poems and the taking of photographs. However they are all rooted in my own experiential engagement with others and are then re-imagined in the first place as acts of aesthetic first person inquiry. In so doing I have found a method of working which enabled me both to deepen my own first person inquiry and also to share this with others. Often indeed it is only when I have written a journal and reflected on it that I discover what truth the moment offered me.

I shall now describe a way of working which is rooted in a close first person inquiry into the intrinsic aesthetic of practice, but which also opens out into further cycles of second and third person inquiry. I do so for the light it casts on exploring organisational aesthetics research as well as action research, from an aesthetic approach.

Noticing what I am noticing

I am aware that what I choose to attend to is a unique expression of my own identity as I engage with others. What is a serendipitous moment for me might be little more than an inconsequential coincidence for another person. I therefore try to notice what I am noticing and what connections and energies doing so generates in me. This is the beginning of first person inquiry as an on-line experiential source of further cycles of reflection. These reflective cycles also act as a way of my becoming more aware of differences within myself and within the group as the same phenomena elicit different responses. These differences show up in the way we are representing the inquiry on-line through the aesthetic kaleidoscope of live dialogue and the narrative direction that a session takes.

Reflecting on 'audience' as I seek to connect my own first person inquiry with second person inquiries

This is a continuation of the noticing process described above, as I try to capture in text what I have noticed. At this stage a sense of audience permeates every word written. I see writing as always containing elements of self and the other, as a dual audience, sometimes one stronger than the other. I strive to raise to higher levels of consciousness this audiencing of the text, whether or not I decide subsequently to share what I write with an actual audience, in the way I did at Silver Street.

Not being inhibited in what I write by allowing inner censorial voices to prevail

Here I am aware of the importance of not delimiting what I write as being unworthy of representation. The antidote to this is to apply the rule of a warm-up exercise in creative writing classes – 'keep the pen moving on the page'. Much of what I have written has never surfaced in the thesis, having been 'selected out' at subsequent stages. Criteria for doing so will have derived from further reviews of the literature or the processes of bricolage as one pieces is 'offered up' to new contexts of meaning.

Writing 'aesthetic sketches' as soon after the event as possible

The immediacy of what arrests the attention is in phenomenological terms of great significance. It is usually the case that the longer it is held in the memory before being written, the more the meaning leaches out of it. I have found it therefore useful to think of this level of journaling as a form of sketching that focuses on the essences of connection the moment has made with me.

Play – Capturing the context and the action

I have found it essential to my own discovery of how a moment engages with me, that I capture sensory details of the context (the mis-en-scène) and of the unfolding of the play narrative of the encounter. I will for example jot down names of participants and details of settings, as well as what I have heard as turning points in dialogue.

The poetic – Retaining as much of the sensuous detail as possible

Another reason for sketching is to retain as much of the metaphorical and symbolic energy of the phenomenological moment, just as a visual artist would hope to capture the detail of light and shade falling across particular forms, which attract the eye. This energy is always intrinsically embedded in the specific and the sensuous, and acquires a new life evocatively again through being fashioned as poetic imagery.

Regarding the writing as a creative task calling for as much practice and critical review as producing a poem or a passage in a novel

If I am writing a poem, the text goes through multiple changes during which whole structures of imagery come and go or take on a different form. (I recently witnessed this process of reflective editing as it occurs in William Blake's notebook, by using the interactive multimedia presentation of it in the British Library.) Although in the thesis I have retained unaltered journal entries as data for further inquiry, this is only after they have already been fashioned along the lines I have been describing. Other material such as Tony's story has been through a subsequent process of re-crafting.

Conclusion to this section

In trying to describe methodological processes of representation that I have used, I notice the extent to which the discipline of first person inquiry involves as much rigour as occurs in the production of a literary work. I also notice that this is not a flight from experience into some creative fiction, but in fact the opposite. It seeks in its improvisation and crafting to enter more deeply into aesthetic experiences, which make up practice. I shall now move on to consider the implications for working in this way within an action research approach.

Section 3 – What this inquiry adds to the action research community

In this section I will firstly offer some general observations on research into action inquiry as a reference point for positioning my own research. Next I will describe my growing experience of action research as a form of bricolage and responses to disconfirming truths. I will then move on to consider what I have learnt about aesthetic representation as both on-line and off-line reflective processes in action research.

Observations on action research

The literature of action research falls into a number of categories, the most influential of which is theoretical writing based on a new paradigm view of a participative universe. This work is often characterised by a sense of pioneering, of challenging former positivist framings of social science borrowed from the natural sciences. I have explored in Chapter 3 how I understand the significance of this paradigmatic shift and how it has influenced me in many areas of my life, including professional practice.

One of the essential achievements of this strand of action research has been within the academy, by making it possible for participative inquiry to be validated as an area worthy of research.

A second area of research has yielded a literature which describes a range of approaches to practice which have a common origin in participative inquiry but which have developed different more programmatic ways of working; I think here of such approaches as appreciative inquiry, learning histories, future search and open space.

Another area of writing has been generated through collaborative research programmes like CARPP where researchers have explored the application, and further development through practice, of the theoretical base so far established. This finds expression in another kind of writing based on exemplars and accounts of action inquiries in an increasingly varied number of contexts. It is to this third category that my research belongs.

Action research theory into practice

I have described in Chapter 1 how I have been making a journey from a practice mainly concerned with the delivery of management training within a positivist tradition, to the development of experience, perceptiveness and skill in working within an action research approach.

Such a transition is not without challenges and surprises. Working from a participatory paradigm is in itself an emergent first person inquiry process. Fisher and Phelps (2006) talk about developing a capacity to surface and reflect on 'disconfirming truths'; these occur as a result of gaps between theory and practice that the bricolage of inquiry uncovers; this process they see as an important part of becoming a more reflective practitioner of action research. The disconfirming truths in my own inquiry were several.

Firstly I had to experience through practical knowing how to cross the threshold between espoused theories of action research to discover what were my theories-in-use, (Argyris and Schon, 1974). This was particularly the case in early forays where my unreflexive adoption of action research jargon was met with suspicion or misunderstanding by potential co-inquirers – the very act of calling them such would have been enough to frighten them away. I had instead to learn that the aesthetic of whatever dialogue I might strive to facilitate in different groups had to connect with the needs that had brought them to the point of meeting together. I also had to strive to relate more closely to their intrinsic aesthetic culture as a living expression of their own systemic interactions over time.

This process is illustrated by the rapid learning that was needed to attune more to the culture and ethos of Silver Street. If it were to have any value for this community as well as to myself, my inquiry called for sufficient connection over a period of time. In fact my decision to locate this exploration of action research practice within a community of people with learning disabilities and their staff, offered a number of advantages. This has been shown in the thesis to have been both a source of challenge in rendering our shared inquiry purposeful and relevant, as well as a personal inspiration in my becoming part of a community of inquiry in a more connected way than in any other work I have done. I have commented in Chapter 1 on the unique perspective on action research that working with this community offered me, both in the extremity of its difference from my other working environments and also its capacity to point up underlying commonalities with them. This has also led me to see the experience of this community at a metaphorical level in that the aesthetic impact of this new locality offered insights into a wider human condition.

As Ladkin (2003) points out, others who have made comparable journeys have questioned from time to time along the way whether they were actually 'doing action research'. Part of what I have reported on in tracking this change has a similar self-questioning; is what I have been doing action research? My account may therefore in itself offer useful data to others with an interest in action research as they make their own sense of connecting theory to practice.

Aesthetic representation in action research

I now consider what I have learnt about the place of aesthetic representation in action research practice. In so doing I am further exploring what theories-in-use I now draw on.

As the research progressed I noticed that my focus of attention was shifting from the use of *expressive* media to a preoccupation with what I came to call the *intrinsic* aesthetic of group practice. (Further definitions of how I use these terms can be found in Chapters 7 and 8.) I had initially expected that I would focus my inquiry into aesthetics in practice on the use of expressive media. This, I imagined, would sit easily with my own interest in aesthetic communication and performance arts.

In practice I have been drawn more and more into the intrinsic aesthetic of practice, as the discussion of an empirical approach to organisational aesthetics in Section 1 of this commentary will have shown. This became so clearly the focus for my reflective writing and recording that the related field of expressive aesthetics in the form of arts-based activities

came to appear only accessible to useful inquiry through a more subtle understanding of the intrinsic. I began to conclude that there was something of greater significance for me in reflecting on the often intangible and nebulous aesthetic dimensions of encounters. I saw the intrinsic and quotidian aesthetic of the community I was being absorbed into as all-pervasive, an inevitable manifestation of our relational engagement. Attending to the quality and dynamics of this aesthetic became the prime focus of my inquiry. I found myself participating phenomenologically with the immediacy of what was happening within the group. This called for a discipline of attention over an extended period of practice. The changing energies and feelings of group work are analogous to the changing key or tempo in a symphony, an image that Bateson's (1975) sees as an embodiment of mind.

I have come to realise that connection or contingency between intrinsic aesthetic experience in groups and any expressive activities that may be introduced, is largely influenced by contextual and relational factors. The art in facilitation is to live with the unfolding aesthetic of the group and encourage participants to work in ways that are experienced as being closely contingent with the specific needs that groups have on the day. An account of such facilitative decision-making can be found in Chapter 12 when I switched to the use of silverfoil modelling to help reframe and move on a review session between staff and the senior management team, to a more active and participative way of working.

The role of aesthetic representation in developing greater reflexivity

I now focus on aesthetic representation within the action research cycle and consider how it offers different ways of connecting first person and second inquiry.

In the improvisational flow of the inquiry, people are drawn to participate with varying degrees of reflexive awareness. Developing greater reflexivity enables people to notice how they are learning as they interact and offers them wider choices about the actions and words that may enhance collaborative inquiry.

The facilitation role has a crucial contribution to make by being more open to the aesthetic of others and by noticing and sharing what draws the group's attention. Appreciative inquiry has something useful to offer to this process in its claim that what we attend to is likely to be the direction in which we increasingly are drawn to move and act. The facilitator can help the group achieve greater consciousness of process by working in this way through their own interventions. This is an important part of what I took be happening in the critical dialogue around Lucy's challenge in Silver Street-2.

However, in my research methodology I have sought to push this further by writing and 'publishing' journals within the Silver Street Centre, a process that I touched on in the previous section. I have already shown how the publishing of my journal enabled me to share crafted aesthetic statements, which were accessible to further analysis and sense-making in dialogue with others. As this is a distinctive practice that may be useful to others I now include a short further reflection on it as a contribution to action research methodology.

The added benefit of my writing and publishing my journal was that I was attempting to widen the aesthetic territory that we might share, by writing from a personal perspective what had particularly drawn my attention in our time together. By letting people into what would otherwise be contained within my own first person reflections, I displayed openness and some vulnerability. This shifted what it became possible to discuss in subsequent and often quite random conversations as we worked together. These too were captured through further writing and returned to the community.

One of the benefits of doing this is that it introduces a different time dimension into the development of shared reflective inquiry. By stopping the clock at the moment of writing, a particular journal item endeavours to capture 'for ever' that stage of inner reflection. (I notice here the parallel with Barthes' [1980] claim for the contemporeality of a photo.) The method also worked in a third person way with a larger network of cardiac consultants, unknown to me, who read my account of having an angioplasty. In the final section of this commentary I will refer to the way first person inquiry may be validated by this publishing and sharing with others.

The decision to publish must however rest with the writer/facilitator. Whether or not it feels right to do so, may be a measure of mutual trust and the quality of openness so far developed in the relationship.

The role of art experience in action inquiries

My research has also helped me clarify what connections there might be between the development of an inquiring practice, and a personal aesthetic life of engaging with the arts, whether as 'reader' or 'writer'. Personal taste and experience in different art forms is evidenced in the aesthetic expressions of a facilitator, as it is also, in the aesthetic of others in the group. I explore this issue in a number of cases in Silver Street-2 in Chapters 9 and

10, in the description of work in Chapter 8 where we used the poetry of Robert Frost, and in a later conversation prompted by a shared interest in W.B. Yeats.

I continue to notice that there is a fertile relationship in my own aesthetic life between engaging in the arts and engaging with people in group work. The resonance of patterns, images and narratives experienced in watching films and plays, and in reading poetry and novels connects with my reflexive experience of working with others. One feeds the other. If this were not the case, why bother to watch or read? During one stage of my working on the thesis I recall being struck by the resonances between moments of practice and my reading of Ian McEwan's novel, 'Saturday'. The sensory detail of his evocation of a part of London where I have frequently worked, connected powerfully with me, as did his description of what it is like to witness the clearance of a mother's home following her death.

The resonance of both these episodes breaches the privacy of first person reflection and helps transform personal experience as the aesthetic qualities of the writing evoke and stir memories. In the process of doing so these reflections never settle back in quite the same place. The image of disarray as the jumbled collection of kitchen implements, familiar since childhood, is emptied into a tablecloth on the floor, is not *an*aesthetically erased by the reading but held outside me so that I can acknowledge its pathos. The writing helps me revisit the moment and notice the slow distancing and diminution of its pain through the passage of time. Most remarkably I am connected through it with the similar experience of others and this I experience as transformative.

My experience of the transformative potency of art is part of what I bring to facilitation, but I have learnt to be reflexively selective in choosing when and how to do so. I have become more easy with such choices and this instinct is the outcome of being more attuned to the intrinsic aesthetics of a particular group. The linking up of the two parallel worlds of responsive engagement with art and the intrinsic aesthetic experience of the inquiring groups, can be very powerful, as the examples in Chapter 8 show. However I try to stop short at the point where doing this might tip over into a teacherly relationship with the group. Such a judgement depends on building up a familiarity with the expressive tastes of the group and a facilitation style which checks individuals' readiness to participate. I am conscious of the need to leave space for people to discover their own connections and articulate their own interpretative critical response.

In this way the introduction of such material is less likely to be experienced by others as a cultural or social imposition on their experience. Art is then left free to work in imaginative and transformative ways that fall outside a propositionally based narrative.

Conclusion to this section

I have identified four areas in my research in Silver Street, which may offer further insights to the action research community.

Firstly I have shown how I have acknowledged and worked with 'disconfirming truths' that arose during this research journey. These included noticing the gap between espoused action research theories and theories-in use, in a process of learning what action research meant to me and to those with whom I inquired. I also noted the alienation that can occur by imposing the specialised vocabulary of action research on those with whom I was seeking to set up dialogue.

I featured my choice to locate most of my inquiry in the Silver Street community and reflect on the differences and commonalities that I experienced in doing so.

Next I considered what I have learnt in focusing on the aesthetic in practice, by using aesthetic approaches. I defined the relationship that I see between the intrinsic and the expressive faces of the aesthetic in practice. I have re-affirmed the primacy of attending to the intrinsic in working with an action research approach. The introduction of expressive activities needs to connect with the contexts and relationships of a particular group. Skill in exercising such choices can be developed through closer in-the-moment attunement to the play and poetics of a group as it emerges.

Then I featured the way I have used writing and photos to connect first person and second person inquiry. My particular method of doing this was to publish written journals and photos which linked my critically subjective text with second person dialogue with individuals and in groups. I referred to the written text as offering a way to stop the clock in reflective cycles.

Finally in this section I pointed out the connection between individual engagement with artworks and the practice of action inquiries. Artworks create analogic and potentially transformative resonances in group dialogue, but need to be introduced sensitively, to avoid the imposition of personal taste.

Validity and quality in this research

In this final section of this meta-commentary I turn my attention to the question of validity and quality in this research. Working within a participative paradigm I have come to see validity and quality as being evidenced in a network of relations and processes in the inquiry.

Although my main purpose here is to confirm my understanding of validity issues in my research, this section may also be read as a supplementary commentary on the previous three. In saying this I am recognising that within a participative paradigm, validity and quality are not evidenced by reference to some objective and pre-existing scale of measurement, but by showing how cycles of critical first and second person inquiry construct sustainable propositions from the subjectivity of shared experience. Validity is not defined from the viewpoint of an external observer, but derives from critical reflection on the multi-voiced assumptions and values of all those who participate.

I have identified three significant areas of my inquiry, to illustrate how it is informed by the concept of critical subjectivity embedded in this understanding of validity.

Validity and quality in my ambivalent role of action researcher/facilitator

In the transition in role that I experienced across the three Silver Street projects I have been able to examine the ambivalence of my presence and participation in this work. A significant part of my claim for the validity of this inquiry rests on the quality with which this awareness of ambivalence is critically reviewed through reflective first and second person inquiry.

The critical subjectivity which Heron and Reason (1997) identify as the epistemological stance of action research is essentially a paradoxical reconciliation of the issue of validity in participative inquiries. Critical subjectivity avoids the primary subjectivity of unreflexive and therefore unvalidated personal feelings and responses, by developing critical reflection on experience through a number of personal and interpersonal channels and processes.

Much of my experience of ambivalence in action research facilitation centres on trying to achieve a balance between a democratic aspiration towards co-inquiry and the fulfilling of a form of facilitative leadership function. (In my research there was a further ambivalence in that from the start I also declared to others that I was researching into my own practice, in parallel with the second person collaborative inquiries into person-centred planning in Silver Street-2 and 3.)

The two short examples that follow are intended to help illustrate how my work develops a critical, reflexive and sometimes ironic position in inquiring into the experiential, presentational and propositional knowing of the aesthetic in practice.

In Silver Street-1 I notice how I negotiated my entry into this community, primarily in my role as researcher. Through my volunteering sessions I negotiated my participation in a relational and experiential way, akin to a developing friendship. I also facilitated two meetings with staff, where this negotiation became more overt and propositional. In Chapter 6 in my account of the first meeting of this project, I have described how participants were concerned to question and validate my purposes in being there. Most of the key propositions in my introductory letter, like my use of terms such as 'thought-provoking' and 'spirituality', were tested in a forthright and rigorous dialogue. The language of my introductory letter been constructed from the framing of my own purposes in inquiring and people had picked on those elements which challenged their understanding of what I was proposing to do.

I experienced an early sense of connection and validity in this dialogic co-creation of meaning. As a researcher I discovered that the propositional terms I had assembled beforehand were beginning to fill up with new narrative meanings in a co-construction between the group and myself as we reflected on them. (This process was subjected to further validation through the structured cycle of reflective writing and sense making in my journaling of these meetings; I shall examine in further detail below this dimension of validation through the sharing of my expressive writing.)

In Silver Street-2 the 'people centred planning' inquiry with the group of front-line staff had begun to assimilate elements of my own first person inquiry. This assimilation occurred because we reached a point where we needed to address, experientially rather through my opening propositions, how we were going to work together, and this overlapped significantly with my own inquiry into more effective practice. What I witnessed happening on this morning was the surfacing of process preoccupations in the group which temporally replaced the task of our collaborative inquiry into person centred planning.

My intention in writing a note beforehand had been to propose a different way of working which would also include a less directive authority role for myself. What happened in the ensuing dialogue, brought to centre stage the paradoxical aspects of this proposition. The irony of firmly directing the group towards less direction surfaced obliquely but powerfully in

the episode analysed in some detail in Chapter 10, which here, for brevity, I refer to as 'Lucy's challenge'.

What I hear happening in this episode is Lucy's on-line testing of my proposal for a different more collaborative way of working. I also hear a groundswell of interest in this different way amongst many others in the group. The multi-voiced playing out of these ideas and feelings had for me a validity which was aesthetically experienced as a form of drama. Although I had initiated it through my proposition, the play had now acquired a creative life of its own within the group process.

The critical subjectivity (Heron and Reason, 1997) referred to above, is in evidence through out my account of this episode. My subjective participation in the play of this morning is tempered by a second level of critique of what was happening around and in me. This prompted me to attend to the issue of power in my role, by acknowledging that I too shared Lucy's curiosity about where we were going; I also strove to be alert to her personal feelings in becoming a minority voice in this dialogue. What had started as my own inquiry issue about collaborative learning, had been assimilated and was now owned by the group.

Validity and quality in using aesthetic approaches

In Section 2 of this meta-commentary I have described my methodology as an aesthetic process. I see it as exhibiting critical subjectivity in its contribution to meaning making in both first and second person inquiry. My writing about subjective experience is shaped by a heuristic focus on my own seeking out relevance and validity in the act of writing. However such a quest will always be constrained by my own framing of experience. Further validation is needed.

This came about as a consequence of deciding to make the writing available within the system that I was entering and relating to. Thus the private journal became public. This decision sprang originally from a concern about establishing a cooperative relationship where I would not be seen as an external observer whose views and judgements were in some sense covert and therefore possibly damaging.

Here I want to show how the responses I received to this invitation provided a multi-voiced validation for the quality of interactions. Some individuals simply gave me a friendly informal acknowledgement in corridors or over cups of tea, of their reading of the journal. It had provoked curiosity. Others wanted to have more reflective conversations.

They acknowledged the accuracy of the observations of shared events and encounters; the journals were recognizable to the extent that, where service users were not specifically named, staff would say, 'I know who you are describing there'. Similar recognition occurred in Silver Street-3 when as people with learning disabilities listened, the read journals triggered off excited reminiscences, like Andrew's 'Cagney and Lacey' cabaret act described in Chapter 13. In this sense the reaction to the material suggests that it was displaying what Sparkes (2002) refers to, as the 'reflexivity, authenticity, fidelity and believability' of autoethnographic texts.

However validity in action research journaling calls for more than believability or descriptive accuracy. Further evidence gathered from staff reactions to the journals included comments about the sense of my appreciation for their work. In fact I had made very little overt comment, either positive or negative, on their performance. I realised that their sense of being appreciated sprang more from the fact that someone had given this amount of attention to the daily routines and interactions of their work and their relationships with service users, with each other and with me. Reading these journals proved to be an affirmative experience for staff. It offered a different view of what life in this community was like. Adopting a relational and aesthetic perspective it seemed to remind them of qualities in their work they may have ceased to notice through habit and overfamiliarity.

Another layer of validation surfaced in those comments which were made in both Silver Street-2 and -3 about my own process and assumptions in writing. Sparkes addresses a similar issue in suggesting that authors need to ask themselves, of their writing, 'What is its aesthetic merit, impact, and ability to express complex realities?' In Chapter 10 I reported how on occasions peopled articulated their curiosity about the way I wrote about them; for example, Beverley, a staff member, described what I wrote as 'poetic'. In Chapter 13 I tell how Sue commented on the way I incorporated 'incidental' moments into my accounts. She felt that I was adopting a 'holistic' approach to our work together. I have referred in Chapter 11 to the process of critical review and re-writing that 'Tony's Story' underwent, through a shared critique between the centre manager and myself as writer.

Through the individual aesthetic stance of my writing and photos, I have attempted to demonstrate my reflexivity in trying to understand the complex realities of my practice in Silver Street. In the previous section I referred to the way in which such expressive

statements made a bridge between the inner arcs of first person reflexivity and second person inquiries, as, the material set up resonances and dialogic connections.

I might sum up the aesthetic theme of this review of validity and quality by posing some of the validation questions by which I now judge my work. Is this inquiry an artful process with disciplines and pleasures comparable with other forms of artworking? Is it informed by aesthetic representation that can be shared and validated between others and myself? Does it value diversity and recognise multi-voiced dialogue and ironies? Is it attracted to what is playful and poetic, as a location for transformative learning?

Validity and quality in cycles of action and reflection

I conclude this section of the meta-commentary by referencing the distinctive purpose of action research, which is self-avowedly to contribute to the well-being of individuals, communities and the larger ecology, (Heron and Reason, 1997). If this is so, a vital measure of the validity and quality of participative inquiries is that they may be shown to result in beneficial action. The trap though in thinking in this way is to set off on a reductionist search for causal links between action and consequence as a form of input and output.

My understanding of the relationship between action and reflection in action research is that the transformational shifts that occur in successive cycles have much the same qualities as those that occur in the shaping of artworks. The inquiry in its inception is a form of imaginative design which is jostled and moved like pebbles, in the stream of action. There follow periods of disciplined reflection, comparable in purpose to those of a sculptor standing back from the part hewn lump of rock. There is creative intention in this reflection, which is revealed in subsequent action. This cycle of reflection and action affirms those who are making the inquiry, sometimes in ways that are unexpected. Cycles may occur over short spans of time within the drama of a morning or an afternoon. They may unfold over many weeks. The measure of their validity is constantly felt in the energy levels and commitment to the life cycle of the inquiry, which must not only begin with a shared focus, but also find a resolution which is satisfactory to participants. I have therefore come to see valid action, not as a matter of achieving targets identified from the outset, but as evidenced by a multiplicity of individual and group discoveries which accrete in moving the inquiry in a direction of growth. What the group experiences and represents as growth is subject to testing through further reflection and action and an ongoing validation process between the group and the systems with which it interacts. For example, in Silver Street this external validation would

be found in the responses to change that are expressed by the multi-voiced client/carer/community system with which it connects.

To provide an illustration from my practice, I refer back briefly to Chapter 12 where I described the way Silver Street-2 concluded in collaborative session between participants and senior managers as they modelled in silver foil the future characteristics of the service they wanted to create.

At a recent meeting between Beverley, the Centre manager, and myself, she updated me on the direction and pace of service improvements that are taking place at Silver Street, many of which evidence the spirit of breaking out of institutional constraints in thinking that energised the modelling. She reported that an arts café run by service users was being considered, as was the proposed closure of an ancient former school premises used till now as the Service's daily venue for over a hundred people with moderate learning disabilities. She described how the building with its powerful resonances of institutional control, school diners and timetables may be replaced by a more flexible service of community-based activities; fresh air is blowing through the system.

It would be self-delusionary to claim that these outcomes were solely attributable to our collaborative inquiries, as many other factors are at play in complex adaptive systems. I noticed, though, in this conversation how the recurrent unfolding of a dream helps re-story emergent patterns of growth; such re-storying results from reflexive inquiry; through its processes of play and poetics, nothing is left quite in the same place. These were the processes that I shared in with Silver Street through my own way of being with them. What they have been able to do with this greater self-awareness was their own choice, but I was glad to have this form of validation through action, for the way we work together.

Conclusion to this section

I have taken three perspectives on the questions of validity and quality. The first of these centred on an exploration of my ambivalent role as facilitator/action researcher in my inquiry with others. From this I have learnt to identify levels of irony in negotiating a more self-aware role in my working with others. I described the essential place of critical subjectivity within my developing action research practice.

Next I considered the validity and quality issues in using aesthetic inquiry approaches. In reflexively tuning into the intrinsic aesthetic, there is a further opportunity to validate the subjective experience of practice. This was instanced by my use of the discipline of journal writing, which when shared with others, becomes a resource for second person validation. My contribution as a facilitator is to attach value to the group's capacity for deeper reflection as a means of improving action.

Finally I returned to the root and purpose of action research and explained how I have come to see *action* as an accretion of discoveries leading to change, which is validated through further cycles of reflection and action.

Conclusion to this meta-commentary

In this meta-commentary I have sought to stand at a distance from the main body of the thesis and ask myself what difference taking this journey has made; in doing this, I have identified what may be of use to the two research communities of organisational aesthetics and action research. I have looked more rigorously at the ways in which I can identify and test the validity of what has been learnt. As I anticipated at the start of the commentary, there have been areas of overlap between these fields, given the empirical orientation of my inquiring into the aesthetic in practice.

The writing of this meta-commentary has proved to be a valuable way of adding to my own understanding of the reflexive experience of action research into the aesthetic in practice, as well as clarifying further my process in developing a multi-voiced way of representing research in this thesis. It has further confirmed the direction of my inquiry towards greater engagement with the intrinsic aesthetic in practice.

Recently I have been working in London with two social care groups new to me. I am also beginning to spend time in arts-based communities where participative processes of reflexive practice around play and poetics are their declared raison d'être. These recent areas of work have given me the chance, as a fully signed up *bricoleur*, to 'offer up' the findings of this thesis to these new practice experiences and I am encouraged by noticing the extent of 'fit' I find between them.

There will of course also be surprises and disconfirming truths en route as my inquiry continues.

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